

**Homily by Most Rev. Felipe J. Estévez
for the Marriage Anniversary Celebration
Christ the King Parish, Jacksonville
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“I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.” Love wants to be self-revelatory. When a couple first begins to date they normally spend long hours in conversation with one another. There is a unique energy in these conversations, a deep desire to receive the other in what they are sharing about themselves; their histories, their feelings, ideas, dreams. Your hearts quickened in these early conversations because they were feeling chosen, privileged to receive the truth about this other one whom you felt to be so good and beautiful. In the early days of dating and engagement these conversations could last for hours. Now, as the years progressed some couples can smile about these beginning conversations at the dawn of their relationship, “we don’t spend that much time talking about ourselves anymore do we?” No, children have arrived, jobs, responsibilities with finances, perhaps even health issues, volunteerism, travel, and more....yes, life has gotten busy.

It is both sad and normal to move beyond the dating stage of spending hours talking and listening...but let’s hope we haven’t move too far beyond the power and truth within this “early” energy to know and be known by your spouse. Perhaps hours of talking are not necessary anymore because frankly you have become one. The presence of your husband, your wife is internalized now. Through all the sharing, and love and yes even busy-ness, you remained vulnerable to each other’s needs and delighted in each other’s goodness, and so: your spouse has “entered your heart.”

You carry one another around inside now. This is the peace of a good marriage. Insecurities have fled, angers have softened, self-interest has flattened and what remains is the conviction that the vowed life worked. We personally entered the structure of a Christ centered marriage because we knew that love on earth is difficult and can even look and feel like the cross. But you chose to love from within a conscious relationship to Christ and his church. In so doing you could remain “faithful unto death do us part.” On our own, without Christ, we might become afraid and seize the self again, hoarding what I think I am losing by loving you, thinking that you are more a “taker” rather than a gift. This is the path of many today. But in Christ and by your regular reception of Holy Communion His way of being spouse to the Church has entered and defined you. With each Holy Communion you received you slowly allowed his voice to replace your fears, his love to guide yours, his strength to keep you united when all the circumstances of your life cried out to “give up.”

No, perhaps you do not speak together for hours any more but now you have revealed yourselves to each other in other ways...in actions, in commitment, in forgiveness, in hope, in shared prayer, and the consolation of joy that only parents can know. Your words and these actions and moreall accomplished in faith...have made you one.

Now, more than ever the culture needs to see you publicly renewing your vows, publicly stating that becoming one and staying one is possible in this world if couples would only open

themselves and let the way Christ loves His Church be the truth of your lives. And how does He so love? Unto death.

There is one virtue that the men should meditate upon that lies deep within the heart of Christ upon the cross that is the virtue of endurance. By trusting that God the Father was sustaining him in his love for sinners Christ could even say yes to the cross. For the welfare of others and out of the strength of his trust in the Father HE REMAINED IN LOVE EVEN AS LOVE CALLED FOR HIS LIFE. Husbands continue to love your wives in this manner: I will stay faithful out of the strength given to me by faith so that the one I love will never think that selfishness or fear can rob me of my freedom to love her.

Wives, your great virtue to meditate upon are that of reconciliation. There is a reason you remember birthdays, and anniversaries (even obscure anniversaries like the date of the first time your husband brought you flowers, or the actual date when he asked to marry you...men have trouble remembering even their wedding dates sometimes!). The reason you remember so well is because the feminine genius is ordered toward communion, toward maintaining relationships. Your virtue then is forgiveness...the glue that keeps families together. All family members need to forgive, it is not a burden you carry alone, but it is a gift you live more closely to than others. Behind this gift is a fierce desire. "I want my family to be one and to remain together." This desire is God's too, that is why you feel it so deeply in your bones. It is God desiring that the family remain together. And this is true even in families where separation has occurred through death, or distance or even divorce. Here, to the best of your ability and in faithfulness to your heart you long for oneness...bring these deep desires to prayer and let God reunite your family as he sees fit and when He does.

For the children here present but young and old...love your parents. They sacrificed much to see you mature. Pray to God in thanksgiving for them and try to emulate their virtues and always forgive their faults, for this, too, is the way you hope your own children will relate to you.

So, couples as the years go on there is less reason for you to "go on and on and on" talking...no, now a grace silence enters as the glue of your friendship. Not the silence of boredom or emptiness but the silence of God the Father before his dead son upon the cross...a silence that is so full of love, so full of awe over who He, and you have become, that God is silent in response to such love. He then does the only thing God will ever do to those who have become like Him: He will deepen your life with even more love, love unto the resurrection of life.

Since you are friends of one another and of Christ...life and love will never be taken from you. You will only circulate in it more and more, unto eternal life.

Today, it is Jesus who in this unique Eucharist, makes you, makes each couple give thanks to the Eternal Father for the gift of witnessing married love in the measure, or in the model of the love of Christ for His Church and of the love of the Church for her beloved. Amen