

**Homily by Bishop Felipe Estévez
for the Marriage Anniversary Celebration
Saturday, October 28, 2017
Holy Family Parish, Jacksonville**

You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world!

Christian marriages are called to provide a distinctive flavor; a condiment to marriage in society...what could be insipid can become delightful if seasoned with joy and positivity.

Instead of an inevitable decay, a relationship can be preserved for eternity.

Christian marriages also provide society the brightness of light; by your mere presence others shall eat better, by your mere presence others shall see well! As disciple missionaries, the Christian couple is called to witness “heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience bearing with one another and forgiving one another,” says St. Paul to the Colossians, and to us today. This is the sort of love, the kind of life that attracts because it shines the light of Christ’s love; it has a flavor which is different from the average, and it stands out...by its freshness.

Jesus says, “A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.” In a classical text, the Letter to Diognetus, it says what the soul is to the body, and Christians are to the world. At a time when there are social forces that present destructive ideologies regarding marriage, the Catholic Church proposes a universal teaching grounded in the Revelation of God’s plan for the love of man and woman blessed by the wonderful gifts of children; a love that endures and perseveres to the end. Love that is dignified as a sacrament also has a rich theological significance!

St. Peter says that a Christian has to be ready to give a reason for our hope. In reading the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis *Amoris Laetitia*, or *Love in the Family*, given last year on the Feast of St. Joseph, I have found in this pastoral document, a great motivation to affirm with courage the truth about marriage and family. I encourage you to read it especially Chapter 4 which is a commentary on I Corinthians 13, the hymn of love. Our teaching on marriage is good news as it is meant to bring joy to the world in the most concrete way as the Church, Mater et Magistra shares the great wisdom for the 21st century.

Couples like you make this Church teaching credible because new generations only listen to teachers if it is seen in their lives (witness). You represent the domestic Church, that is the family, and you evangelize your sons and daughters and their children by setting up marriage as God intends over the mountain so that in spite of limitations, human imperfections, Christ might shine brightly in you and through your vows.

Pope Francis says on multiple occasions the importance of grandparents in the family is holders of the memory. How important it is for grandparents to be loved, appreciated, and respected! How important is that transmission of family values, especially of family prayer which the grandparents do with purpose and joy.

Last Sunday was the feast of St. John Paul II, as you know, Pope Woytila had a passion for marriage and the family. As a play writer he wrote, the *Jeweler's Shop*, which I went to see twice. A favorite section of the play is when the couple goes shopping wishing to buy the wedding rings, and in the process, the jeweler explains to them the sacred meaning of the ring because of the words each person says to the other. How special it is for you to remember today those vows as your parents and siblings and friends and the priest witnessed by listening to you both with reverence and awe.

You treasure the pictures and the souvenirs of your wedding, and you celebrate with family and friends with a meal, but how deeply special it is to offer it up to God with a Mass; with this Mass at the Church of the Holy Family in Jacksonville! The words of St. Paul become true, for we are “singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in our hearts to God (the source of all blessings)...giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Amen! All together! Amen!