

**Homily for Anniversary Celebration  
by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez, S.T.D.  
St. Matthew Catholic Church, Jacksonville  
November 17, 2018**

1<sup>st</sup> Reading: 1 John 4: 7-12

Gospel: Matthew 5: 1-12a

At the summit of creation, God created man and woman. He gave each to each other in mutuality. From the very beginning, man is to be a blessing to the woman and the woman to the man. For John Paul II, the awareness that you are to be a gift to the other is most important. Because you are a gift, you are awesome, you are wonderful, you are the best that has happened to the other.

And being a precious gift is rooted in each one as loved first by God – God who is love. And in the making of each in his image and likeness, God has made us lovable, capable of relationships for self-giving and joy. This is indeed a luminous reflection of God in ourselves. Each couple gathered tonight celebrating a covenant that has lasted decades is here because instinctively you are aware that you are blessed by love. You are blessed for the good companion God has given you. You have built a family; you have reasons to give thanks and gratitude.

We are all concerned with the eruption of violence and killing, let us think of Philadelphia, California, Baltimore, etc. All these incidents bring such sorrow and consternation to our families. At the root of violence is a lack of gratitude, a lack of goodness, an absence of love, and a feeling of unhappiness. What is missing in that lonely heart? At the end of the day, creation is not perceived as good, and what is lacking is a realization that happiness is only possible by the sincere giving of self to others.

Years ago when you decided to be married, you were asked for your baptismal certificate. You may have considered this request a mere protocol, but in fact, it is not. In baptism each of us become a creation of God, a child of God anointed to become a prophet, a priest, a king; called for holiness of life in a journey of discipleship in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Challenged to be light to the world, salt to the earth, that is why your marriage is a Christian marriage ... God's providence intended that my nearest neighbor (the spouse) assist me in the way of holiness and not be an obstacle to the mission.

The Beatitudes is the charter of holiness. And the Beatitudes are the Lord's guidance in setting our priorities right. "Blessed are the poor" reminds us to be poor, to be open, to listen, to learn from my spouse. "Blessed are those who mourn" reminds us never to be indifferent to the pains and struggles of my partner. "Blessed are the meek" reminds us to be always gentle and cordial to the spouse. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" is to be worthy of the trust of my partner, witnessing real integrity of life. "Blessed are the merciful" is to be compassionate and understanding of my partner, never staying in appearances. "Blessed are the clean of heart" is witnessing chaste love when most intimate with one another. "Blessed are the peacemakers" is creating an atmosphere of peace at home where conflicts are resolved without

drama and understanding overcomes emotional distancing. Practicing the Beatitudes lifts the couple to a life of excellence, to a marriage seeking holiness of life all the time.

Vatican II calls the family a domestic church, a church in its smallest version. One could say the first church, the parish situated in a particular neighborhood is the network of families. Each Sunday the Eucharist attracts families to join hands around the Word of Scripture and the Altar of Sacrifice for the gift of all gifts, the gift of the Redeemer, the Mass, the Eucharist. The Mass is a sign that you have not walked alone but that the Lord has been with you, feeding you, strengthening you, enabling you to be fruitful.