

Sermon for Epiphany II – John 2:1-11

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

In the church, we are now celebrating the Epiphany season, the time when Jesus Christ reveals Himself as true God and true man. Our Lord shows this truth yet again through His first miracle: changing water into wine at Cana in Galilee. It was at a wedding celebration. So God's glory is joined to and revealed in marriage.

God loves and blesses marriage. It's good for us to listen to what God says about marriage, whether we are married or not, because marriage is for the benefit of all.

But we live in a time when marriage has fallen into disgrace. Millions of unmarried men and women cohabit as if living together as one flesh without first getting married is not just acceptable, but even normal and expected. Sex outside of marriage is no longer condemned as sin. There is no more shame. Further, sexual relationships between men and men and women and women have been elevated to a "legal right" in our country as the oxymoron of "same-sex" marriage.

We live in confused times, to say the least. What is a Christian to do? We turn to the word of God. When the Lord said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him," He was talking about the husbands here today. When Moses records that God brought the woman to the man, He was talking about the wives here today. The words that Moses penned centuries ago are talking about us here and now: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Jesus affirms this when He says of our marriages, "They are no longer two, but one flesh."

When we hear the marriage of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis, we are hearing an historic account. This is no fable. This is no fairytale. It's history. But it's also more than an account of what happened then and there. It also describes what happens here and now. The same God who joined Adam to Eve as one in Paradise joins one man to one woman together in our day as well. True, we're not living in Paradise; we are sinners living in a sinful world. But when God joins you together as husband and wife, He is doing what He did when He joined Adam and Eve together in the beginning, before the fall into sin!

Marriage is not a sacrament. But marriage does show us the reality of our Lord Jesus Christ. He lays down His life for His Church. He washes her clean of all her sins in Holy Baptism. He joins Himself to her in an unbreakable bond. Jesus doesn't believe in divorce from His bride the Church, and He is incapable of unfaithfulness. His devotion to her is total. He presents her to Himself, "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."

Men and women love each other for a variety of reasons. Poets and singers can tell us all about it. Watch virtually any movie or turn on the radio and you'll find a love story, in one form or another. But for a Christian, the greatest bond that can exist between husband and wife is that they share the same Christian faith. What is most highly prized by the one is the same thing highly prized by the other. When you are married to someone who shares with you the confession of the true Christian faith, you are married to someone who shares with you the most precious possession a man or a woman can have in this life.

What binds husbands and wives together is the truth of how Christ has made His bride holy, spotless, glorious, and without any flaw. This truth not only saves our souls, but it unites us in both body and soul in marriage.

If you know the Gospel, you understand marriage. You can't truly understand marriage if you don't know Christ and His love for His Church. With the world everything is a deal. And this idea infiltrates the some Christian theologies. It's the Jesus-as-a-dealmaker façade: "If you make me lord of your life, I'll become your Savior and establish a personal relationship with you. Give

your heart to me and you can depend on me keeping my end of the bargain." Or, "Follow these 10 easy rules for the husband and the wife and watch your problems fade away."

But the real Jesus doesn't make deals. He's all in. He's not a fifty/fifty (or other percentage) type of god. He lays down His life. He doesn't write new rules to which we must submit. He dies for His Church. This Bridegroom takes the sins and guilt upon Himself and covers it all by His blood. He takes away her shame and gives her the garment of Divine dignity in its place – the dignity of being regarded and treated as a beautiful bride in whom not even the Eternal Judge God Almighty can see a single fault.

The submission of the Church to Christ is that of simple faith. She submits to being served by Him. She entrusts herself to His care. She confesses her confidence that His suffering and death take away her sin and guilt and that His Baptism washes her clean and makes her holy. She follows Him as her Head, knowing that His love for her is the divine purpose in everything He does.

Husbands, there is no greater privilege in life than the responsibility that God gives a man to love and provide for his Christian wife. This is frightening for many men, because they start out not knowing what they're doing. Now after they've been married for some time, we still don't know what we're doing. But you don't need to have your whole life mapped out to know that you serve your Lord Jesus by loving your wife. Jesus accepts your offering of love, not because it's pure in its self, but because you offer it in His name. When you treat your wife with tenderness and patience, forgiving her faults and placing her needs before your wants, you are imitating your Lord Jesus. This is a holy offering to God. It's holy because God makes it holy for the sake of Jesus in whose name you do it.

Wives, when a husband has the respect of his wife, he is truly a wealthy man. God enables a woman to make her husband rich, even if neither one has any money. The submission a Christian woman offers to her Christian husband is not our culture's imagined strawman, the "let-me-be-your-doormat" kind of submission. Rather, it's the concrete way of expressing your faith in Jesus. You submit to your husband as to Jesus. Just as your Lord Jesus serves you and saves you by serving you, you look to your husband with confidence that he can be trusted. You give him the respect that you want to show to Jesus. You take his name, even as you have Christ's name, and are a daughter in God's family. Just as the Church entrusts her future to Christ with full confidence, you confidently entrust your future to your husband.

You've heard it said, "God blesses marriage with children." But the inverse is also true: God blesses children with marriage. Faithfulness to each other by the husband and the wife in marriage is the greatest gift that fathers and mothers can give to their children. The Fourth Commandment that teaches children to honor their father and mother is served by the Sixth Commandment that teaches husbands and wives to be faithful to one other. A faithful marriage makes for a healthy family.

Jesus gives His life for His Church. His Church submits to His gracious care. This is more than a pattern for husbands as husbands. This is more than a pattern for wives as wives. It is the pattern for us as Christians. This marriage is for the benefit of all.

So to the married, to the single, to the separated, and to the widowed, as we hear God's Word together, as we receive the same gifts together of forgiveness of sins, life, peace, freedom from guilt, and eternal salvation, God unites us in the mystical union of Christ and His Church.

It was for us that God instituted marriage. He did so in Paradise. After we fell into sin, Jesus reunited the broken relationship between God and man. He did so by His first miracle at the wedding in Cana. He did so by His death, giving up His life on the cross for His bride to take away her sin. He did so through Holy Baptism as He washes us clean so that no fault can be found in us. Our marriage was made in Paradise, but God makes it holy on earth where we live. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✨BJF✨