

## Sermon for Epiphany II – John 2:1-11

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

Our Lord's first miracle during His earthly ministry was changing water into wine in Cana at a wedding. Of all the many miracles that Jesus did, the first ever recorded took place at a wedding. So our Lord thinks marriage is important – so much so that He gave a commandment to protect it. "You shall not commit adultery."

The reason why it is called adultery is because it adulterates or pollutes something that is pure. Marriage is pure because God is pure and God made marriage. And we are made in the image of God. So the Sixth Commandment applies to us. "You shall not commit adultery."

God gave the Sixth Commandment for the purpose of defending, supporting, and encouraging marriage. Marriage is a life-long union of one man and one woman. "The two shall become one flesh," God said. God marries the woman to the man and the man to woman, and thereby God makes something that did not exist before. Jesus gave strict instructions against the breaking of marriage precisely because it is God who joins the husband and the wife together to make them one flesh. The reason why adultery is grounds for dissolving a marriage is not because it causes pain and suffering (which it does), but because it breaks the bond that God Himself established. Imagine if you have built something with your own hands and someone else comes along and completely destroys it – leveling it to the ground. Wouldn't you be angry? Wouldn't you be disappointed?

God has determined when and with whom sexual relations are to be enjoyed: only within the bond of marriage. Our feelings of romantic love can change from time to time. But remember this: the Bible doesn't tell a man to marry the woman he loves. The Bible tells him to love the woman he has married.

Because that love that God commands is set forth clearly in St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians where He tells husbands to love their wives as Christ love the church and give Himself for her. It is an unconditional, self-sacrificing love. This is a love that *does*. It doesn't just *feel*. It is a love that puts the needs of the loved one above any other consideration.

The love celebrated in numerous popular love songs is different. We call it romantic love. It is, in many ways, blind and unreasonable. It brings euphoric joy with no rhyme or reason to it. It parades itself as true. It wants to be long-lasting. But it is, in fact, as transient as expired milk: here one day and gone the next. Why?

Because this kind of love is self-centered. This kind of love asks, "What can my lover give to me?" This is the wrong question. Christian love, the love commanded in God's Word, asks "What can I give for the one I love?" That is the right question.

Willful and stubborn people presume to change God's definition of love. They want "love" to serve them. But God defines love as service to the neighbor, not to the self. Our culture's view of love defines love precisely in the opposite way. We want what we want when we want it, and so we will rebel against anyone who says no to us. That, of course, is idolatry, because God alone is the One to whom we must never say no. Today's morality rejects the authority of God. The disciples of this religion see something and they want it – so they take it. They deny the obvious fact that they are simply using someone else to pleasure themselves. They cover up their selfishness by redefining it as a meaningful relationship.

But it is meaningless. When the pleasure is gone there is nothing to show for it but a vague sense of bitterness that the relationship is over. Those addicted to the sins of the flesh are constantly looking for what they cannot have.

God knew what He was doing when He joined the intimacy of marriage to the conceiving and bearing of children. Marriage is the foundation of the family, and the family is the foundation for all civil authority, peace, and wellbeing. God knew what He was doing when He invented marriage for us. He gave us something uniquely beautiful. In fact, only a Christian who has been ushered into the holy mysteries of the faith by the Holy Spirit can really understand the full beauty of marriage.

By our unfaithfulness and adulteries in thought, word, and deed we have chipped away at and even leveled the pure and good gift that God gives in marriage. Yet God our Father has done the unthinkable for us. He completely leveled the Temple of His Son. His Son's body was destroyed on the cross, a Temple razed to ground in the place of our unholy temples. By this one act, God has taken away all our adulteries and breaking of marriage. Three days after destroying His Son, God resurrected Him to new and eternal life. This is the life given to us. And we are pure and holy once again.

Christ Jesus gave His life for His Church. She was unattractive – ugly, in fact – and a faithless woman without any virtue at all. But His love covered all her sin. Not just emotionally, not just somewhere in the hidden recesses of His heart, but openly, there in public, before the whole world. There as He was extended up for public shame and ridicule as a criminal nailed to the cross, there it was that He bore His bride's shame, guilt, and sin, taking it away. There it was that He gave His life for His Church.

In Holy Baptism He sprinkled His holy, precious Blood upon her to wash away her sin. He who gave Himself *for* her now gives Himself *to* her. There in that washing, the Church, the bride of Christ, is born. She is born anew, and she is very beautiful. She has no sin. Her unfaithfulness is forgotten. Her ugliness is no more, replaced by a beauty that far transcends the beauty of the most beautiful bride in the world.

He cherishes her and serves her in love. She submits to Him by trusting Him implicitly and completely. She trusts in the One who gave her her identity. She receives the One who gave her His name. She is the Holy Christian Church! She is the bride of Christ! She lives to serve Him who gave His life for her and to her.

This beautiful mystery is the pattern that God established for the Christian marriage. Can you imagine Jesus leaving His wife that He purchased with His own blood? Impossible! Can you imagine the Church leaving Jesus for another man? Impossible! No, this union of Christ with the Church He loves is the union that now sanctifies every single Christian in the world. And it most surely sanctifies our marriages.

Christian wives: Your husband will not love you as Jesus does, but you submit to him because you have Jesus and it is for Jesus' sake that you receive your husband as your head. He may not deserve it, but Christ surely does.

Christian husbands: Your wife will not be in your eyes nearly so precious as she is in God's eyes, so you must see her as God sees her. She is holy and blameless.

Only one thing will make us what we must be. That is this: Christ died for you and forgives you. This is our greatest treasure. Your sins are forgiven because Jesus bore them. This empowers us to forgive one another. And that is power, dear friends in Christ. That is real power. To forgive your husband or wife is to claim him or her for yourself, just as Christ had done for us. It is a power that you have only when you first received it from God. God gives us forgiveness in His gospel and sacraments. We receive this forgiveness through faith and through faith alone. Give this forgiveness to one another in your homes where it is sorely needed now. Amen.

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