

Reflection for Thursday 30th July 2020

This week we celebrated the feast of St Anne and St Joachim, the parents of Our Lady. Her mother Anne was barren, unable to bear children until she conceived Our Lady through a special grace from God. As Catholics we believe that Mary was conceived without sin, the immaculate conception, so it's no surprise that Anne and Joachim were very holy and specially chosen to give birth to the Mother of Jesus. As St John Damascene, one of the early church Fathers wrote, 'By your pure and holy way of life you brought up that jewel of virginity, she who before giving birth was a virgin, who while giving birth was a virgin and who after giving birth was ever a virgin; ...who was to cherish virginity in mind, in spirit and in body.'

St Anne and St Joachim are the only married couple who are saints in the Catholic calendar, or at least they were until another couple were canonised in 2015. These were Louis and Zeile Martin, who lived in France in the 19th century and were the parents of the much loved and venerated St Terese of Liseux. The couple had nine children but four died in infancy. They lived 150 years ago, Louis was a watchmaker and Zeile was a housewife who dedicated herself to bringing up the family, living modestly but always ready to help the poor and needy. They made sure they said family prayers every day in the household.

In 1877, at the age of 45, Zeile Martin sadly died of breast cancer after only 19 years of marriage, leaving Louis a widower and having to look after the children by himself. They were canonised saints by Pope Francis because they found holiness through their married life together. While living a normal, happy life Louis and Zeile showed their children the way to holiness and encouraged them in the faith.

To be canonised a person has to perform a miracle as a result of their intercession. As a result of prayers to Louis and Zeile a little girl called Carmen was cured having been born prematurely with multiple life threatening complications. Carmen suffered a major haemorrhage in the brain which caused have caused irreversible damage. However

she was completely cured through the intercession of this holy couple and their feast day is 12th July.

Let us be inspired by the example given to us by married couples of strong faith who lived according to the will of God. In the present time, when married life is undervalued and under threat let us do all we can to promote marriage among young people. The greatest vocation crisis in the church today is not so much the shortage of priests but the shortage of married couples trying to live a Christian life in accordance with the teachings of the Church.

May the Lord bless us and all families and may Our Lady protect us.

Deacon Kevin