

Thursday Reflection for 24th June 2021

Quite recently I conducted a wedding, the first one since the lockdown. I came across this short piece on the meaning of Catholic marriage.

Every marriage looks a little different. Some couples marry young, others late. Some are very similar while some seem to verify the old adage, “opposites attract”. But if you were to ask Pope Paul VI, he would tell you there are 4 things that should mark each and every marriage.

These four marks of marriage come from paragraph 9 of the landmark encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. Ultimately, these four marks simply describe what love, particularly between married couples looks like.

Love is above all an act of the will. A choice to choose the good of the other regardless of how it affects you, and a choice to make a gift of your very self to them. Since love is a choice, it is a gift, it must be **free**.

What is unique about married love is that it is **total**. We are all called to love everyone, friend and foe, but we are not called to buy a house and have a family with everyone we meet. It is only in marriage that couples make an absolute gift of themselves, to live together and cherish one another for the rest of their lives.

Since married love is truly total, it encompasses living together, starting a family together, and so on, it means putting your spouse above all others. So, it follows that marriage must also be **faithful** and

exclusive.

The fourth and final mark also stems from the fact that husband and wife give themselves totally. That is, marriage should also be **fruitful**, in particular by having children. For one, part of the unique and total gift of spouses is to give both their soul and body, which naturally ends in the procreation of children. The second reason for this mark is a little more philosophical.

St. Thomas Aquinas argues that love and goodness goes beyond itself and brings forth more good and life. The love between married couples is so great that from their love comes life, just as all of creation is an overflowing of God's infinite love and goodness.

How great is the dignity and call of marriage. To love each other as Christ loves us: freely, totally, faithfully, and fruitfully! Of course in reality that not every marriage is like this high ideal. Many marriages fail for one reason or another. But a Catholic marriage should stand a very good chance of success because the grace received from the sacrament is the love and presence of God within the home. The old saying that the family that prays together stays together is also true.

Deacon Kevin (adapted from 'My Catholic Gifts')