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NEWSLETTER – June 2022

Appreciation of Marriage Vocation

In April, our Diocese hosted the Cape Town Metropolitan¹ workshop for Marriage and Family Ministry in East London under the leadership of Mrs Msengana, our Diocesan Marriage and Family Ministry coordinator. As the word “Ministry” suggests, the purpose of this desk is to support Marriage and Family so that those who are married are sustained in their vocation and that others become open to a call to marriage. In this newsletter, I wish to recall a few principal points about Catholic marriage by way of encouraging appreciation of the vocation to Marriage.

Natural law as the basis for Marriage

To marry is one of those exercises that belong to natural law, meaning by that a behaviour or practice that is common to all human beings, albeit with some differences. It is a law that is known and practised by all people by virtue of being human, a law that is inherent in all human beings, for example, the common understanding among all human beings that murder is wrong.

When it comes to marriage, this means that all human beings understand and agree that, unlike animals that mate and procreate, human beings agree that before a man and a woman can have sexual relations, some form of contractual agreement with some form of continuity or permanence and mutual responsibilities to each other must be reached. Furthermore, it also belongs to the natural law that such

¹ Although officially we belong to Durban Metropolitan, for practical purposes imposed by linguistic and cultural identity as amaXhosa and Basotho, we belong more to Cape Town and Bloemfontein Metropolitans than to Durban. I am sure this matter will occupy ample space in the agenda of planned discussions about the re-demarcation of Dioceses in the SACBC territory.

union must have procreation (birth of children) as one of its ends or purposes.

Elevation of Natural Marriage into Sacramental Marriage

Therefore, when a Catholic woman and a Catholic man marry or a Catholic marries a Protestant, they are doing what is common to all humanity.

However, as Catholics or baptised persons, their marriage is elevated to another level. By elevating marriage into a sacrament, the Church seeks to bring out the religious and spiritual dimensions of marriage that go beyond emotions and good feelings about each other, which fade with time.

At this elevated level, Catholic marriage retains *Fecundity* (openness to having children) as one of its ends but goes further to include *Freedom, Faithfulness, and Permanence*.

Put differently; Catholic marriage must be entered into with freedom, with a commitment to remain faithful, with the understanding that it is lifelong and with love that is open to life, including the bearing of children.

If one of these four elements is missing in the intention of one or both of those entering marriage, then the marriage is not valid, at least from a Catholic point of view. These four elements also shape the Catholic belief about divorce, same-sex marriage, sex before marriage and abortion, a topic for another newsletter.

The Sacramental aspect means that this sort of high level of marriage, in the sense that it brings natural marriage fulfilment, is not lived by human ability but by the grace of the sacrament. What is interesting is that spouses are a sacrament to each other. To appreciate what this means, let's briefly take a little detour and explain what a sacrament is.

While Christ is present outside the Church context, the church teaches that Christ is especially present in the liturgy when the Word of God is proclaimed and shared and sacraments are celebrated. Thus, in liturgy, Jesus continues to become flesh and dwell among us in an efficacious manner.

Through the seven sacraments (which can be defined as “visible signs of invisible grace”) inclusive of Marriage, the church uses human beings and material elements, such as water, oil, bread, and wine, as instruments of graced encounters with Christ today. Meaning, therefore, that Marriage, being also a Sacrament, husbands and wives are efficacious instruments of grace to each other and together to their children, the Church, and the community at large.

It is they themselves who give and receive this sacrament from each other and are the ones who make it happen with their nature as man and woman (material) and with the words (form) they say to each other and the intention².

In their declaration of consent, manifest by the promises they make as they profess their vows, the bride and groom become the ministers of the sacrament to each other. The priest or the deacon serves as an official witness to confirm that the couple has the same understanding and intention about marriage as the Church has. Often, we speak of priests as “marrying the couple”, but the correct rendering is “witnessing the couple’s marriage” because it is the couple that effects the sacrament; it is them that makes the sacrament occur.

When they marry each other, the couple proclaims Christ’s free, faithful, permanent, and fruitful love to their spouse. Put differently, when each spouse declares his/her free, faithful, permanent, and fruitful love to the other, he/she is making real Christ’s faithful, permanent, and fruitful love for

² To be valid, each sacrament must have the material substance, the form (which are the words that are spoken) and the intention. Thus, for example, the material for baptism is water and the form are the words spoken when baptising. For a marriage to be valid it requires the material substance of a man and woman, the form which is words they say to each other and the intention to remain in it permanently and faithfully with openness to beget children.

the other. Each partner is a visible sign to the other of how much Christ loves each one of them. Through their relationship, the married couple provides each other with the opportunity and the platform to encounter Christ. The married couple becomes a tangible expression of Christ's invisible love for each other.

It is this reality of being a tangible sign of God's love for each other that couples seek to express on Valentine's Day and anniversaries when they say, "you are the best thing that ever happened to me" or "you are God's gift to me", "you are my pillar", "there is no me without you", etc. As they both bring each other close to Christ, they grow in holiness, and in this way, marriage becomes a means of sanctification for the couple.

Married people as a continuous sacrament to each other Sanctification does not occur in one day. It takes a lifetime, so if the couple is to be the means of sanctification for each other, the vows made on marriage day with their four intentions must be made repeatedly every day. Many sacramental consents follow the couple's first sacramental consent.

Every time a husband or wife decides to love the other even when they do not feel very loving, and every time they forgive each other, every time they try their best not to give in to the temptation of infidelity, every time they take their fair share of responsibility for the family, they are consenting again to love each other faithfully.

Witness to Love as Mission of the Married

The primary mission of the married people towards each other is that they embody Christ's love for each other. If God is Love, as St. John tells us, then married people are engaging in an important mission of manifesting this love. Furthermore, couples who model this type of faithful love attract others to them. They become a model for their children to love.

By their example, they proclaim the good news of Christ's love to those around them; in this way, they are an

evangelising force in our church. It is for this reason that St. Paul makes marriage an example of Christ's love for his Church when he says in Ephesians 5:31-32: "For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one" and he goes on to say "This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the Church"³.

Just as negative behaviours have consequences on our families, church, and society, positive behaviours have a ripple effect, reaching out to our families, church, and society in many life-giving ways. These positive behaviours further the church's mission and give flesh to Christ's command that we love one another.

While love in marriage includes joyful moments, it also persists in difficult times because marital love is not about a feeling but a commitment. Loving despite suffering, betrayal, disappointment, and the monotony of marriage points to something more than just human love; it points to the love of Christ and to which married people witness in a world that shuns commitment.

Called to further participation in the mission of the Church

While married couples evangelise by the example of their lives, like all baptised people, they must also engage in other intentional and needed activities for evangelisation in the Church. They are not just called to themselves but also to the larger mission of the Church according to the circumstances of their lives and environment.

In addition to being a "Domestic Church" between themselves and their children, they must also be part of the larger Church. They must avoid the "just the two of us" (Mina Nawe) view of love and marriage, which is a big temptation for what is called a "Nuclear Family". Such

³ Marriage is a mystery because it conveys the truth of the permanent relationship between Christ and his Church. According to St. Paul, as God ordained a permanent union between Christ and the Church, so has God willed marriage to be a reflection of this relationship by making husband and wife indissolubly united in marriage.

families, you cannot get them to be involved in the Church mission because “they must be with the family”.

This “nesting” view of marriage that encourages staring at each other’s eyes while their backs are turned to the world is contrary to what love is. While it is true that marriage is first about the spouses who must be grounded in love for each other, this grounding is meant to empower them for a broader mission in the Church.

Married people must serve together and be mutually supportive of the wider mission of the Church. While the couple must be inwardly grounded, it must be outwardly focused because love is outward focused with a mission beyond itself. Married people must be prepared to take up various ministries as part of their participation in the wider mission of the Church.

In their grounded marriage, they must discern what particular way are they called to reach out beyond the confines of their marriage. An example of an inwardly grounded marriage and strong enough to reach out is the Domitilla and Danny Hyams couple. They founded a society of the Little Eden for intellectually challenged children in Gauteng⁴. They are being proposed to be considered for beatification (to be declared saints). After Benedict, Daswa will be the second family in South Africa to be considered for sainthood.

An ideal that is confronted by human weakness

I have presented the ideal of what a Catholic marriage should be, but most marriages fall short of this ideal. This does not mean that we should drop the standard and settle for less about marriages as other churches have done and as many voices within the Catholic clamour for change.

This human failure and challenges experienced in marriage call for the support of marriage, which the Marriage and Family desk is trying to do. I am glad to observe the impetus

⁴ More information about them can be found at this site: [Maria ‘Domitilla’ Hyams née Rota – The Hyams Cause](#)

of this ministry, and I assure all those involved in it of my prayers and support.

Africa Day

The ended month of May was dedicated to African Unity, meant to increase pride about the African continent and to enhance efforts to make it prosperous in all aspects, particularly to gain political and economic stability. The theme of AU for this year and emphasised in this Africa month of May was “building resilience in nutrition on the African continent: Accelerate the human capital, social and economic development”.

Many opinions ranged from pessimistic views to optimistic possibilities to building the continent. My view is that the situation is complex. Both possibilities of success and failure exist together in Africa. Instead of being gloomy and pessimistic or sentimental and unrealistically optimistic, let us be realists and align ourselves with attitudes and possibilities that bring success closer than those that guarantee failure.

At the practical and grassroots level, let us strive for hard work, professionalism, and excellence in the different corners where we are. The combined efforts of hard work and excellence will see the continent gradually developing.

Youth Month

This month of June, as we know, is dedicated to the youth. The Diocesan youth ministry is presently done at lower and localised levels in the parishes. Let us use June 16 to increase the drive about this ministry and assure our young people that we have not abandoned them.

Young people thrive in gathering, so I propose that on June 16, we invite young people to gather at the deanery level in one place and have some programme with them. Please, before Sunday, agree among yourselves over the phone about where you will meet and announce the place of gathering

this coming Sunday. To make things easier, I propose that for catering you ask them to “bring and share” instead of going into the trouble of catering.

Discussion on re-demarcation of Diocesan borders

When I wrote to Rome some years back, proposing a change of name for our Diocese from Umtata to Mthatha, I sparked a discussion about the need to revisit the names of other dioceses and borders in the light of changed geographical boundaries after 1994. And so, with that, the discussion in the SACBC about the re-demarcation of Dioceses. Either on the 14 or 15 of June, the Cape Town Metro will discuss this matter via video conference, and I will invite two priests and two lay people to join me because this discussion, in the light of the synod, must be inclusive.

A Visit to Germany

Two weeks ago, I went to Germany to see a world-famous passion play done every ten years and attend some short meetings on behalf of the National Consultation of the Church Leaders in South Africa. I used the opportunity to visit Remlingen Monastery, where two of our retired veteran missionaries, Frs. Jank and Clemens are. They send warm greetings to you, and I hope that in seeing them in the photo, you will also be inspired as I was, to continue with earnest in building on the foundations they laid and reiterate appreciation for them.



New Chaplaincy appointments

Among the many tasks that Fr. Sello has been leading, I have decided to relieve him of the chaplaincy to the youth and have asked Fr. Kabasele to take over this task with immediate effect. Mgrs. Tsalong has been assisting the Men's union as a chaplain, and I wish to announce him as the Chaplain of this sodality. Fr. Schikwanda is now the chaplain for the Marriage and family desk. Fr. Tshitenge is joining Fr. Pinji as Prison and police Chaplains for the Western, Central and Eastern Deaneries.

Ordination of the new bishop of Kokstad

As is known, Fr. Thulane Mbuyisa, the present general superior of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Marianhill, has been appointed as the new bishop of Kokstad. We congratulate Kokstad diocese and wish bishop-elect Mbuyisa strength and wisdom as he begins a new ministry in the Diocese.

He is not only a neighbour but also, through the presence and work of the CMMs in our Diocese, has been a close collaborator, and so, it makes sense that as much as possible, we support him by attending his ordination.

Yours in the power of the promised Advocate



+Sithembele Sipuka
Bishop of Mthatha