



**Homily at the Mass for Marriage
Saint Columba's, Chester
Saturday 8th June 2024**

Today we come together to give thanks for 1,970 years of married life faithfully lived! A life-time commitment to which you each give personal testimony. As your bishop, I join so many in your lives today who give thanks for the incalculable good your marriage has brought to family, community and society, through all the joys and sacrifices of these years you celebrate. For the marriage commitment you entered like the young couple Tobias and Sarah described in the Scriptures praying *"...In singleness of heart, be kind enough to have pity on us and bring us to old age together and together they said Amen, Amen"*ⁱ This same prayer of your youth brought blessing not only to your lives but to the lives of so many others, especially your children.

Research indicates that the single most important factor in a child's flourishing is the stable relationship of their parents and while this stability is the norm when parents are married, it is the exception when they are not. Recent surveys also indicate most young people in 21st Century Britain still aspire to the enduring faithfulness of marriage, even as we suffer one of the highest rates of family breakdown anywhere in Europe and witness the institution of marriage in near-catastrophic decline. Sadly, in public life and policy we have seen a parallel diminishment of the place of marriage, as if it were merely a lifestyle choice rather than the bedrock on which the well-being of the individual and society is bound upⁱⁱ. Amid the many choices and challenges faced at a General Election, we cannot hope for families and society to flourish if marriage does not flourish. And while we cannot expect a generation of politicians to resolve so great a crisis, we should expect our elected representatives to have the courage and responsibility to recognise the central place of marriage in securing the good of society and of new generations.

The immense good which depends on marriage should never surprise us because we recognise that the lasting union of man and woman as the plan of the Creator of all things because the Church teaches *“The vocation of marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they come from the hand of the Creator”*ⁱⁱⁱ. Through all the changing social and cultural conditions of centuries and millennia, in the face of everything that has threatened to diminish and devalue the dignity of marriage, the Church has unfailingly defended this lifelong, faithful commitment of love where the gift of children is welcomed.

Today, we need the same courage which the Holy Spirit gives, to propose this vision of married love and faithfulness to new generations many of whose parents were not themselves married. The Church needs to teach with unfailing clarity the plan of our Maker in marriage which was raised by Christ to be a Sacrament where, as in the first miracle at Cana in Galilee, we come to know His power and presence^{iv}. Yet, it is your witness as Christian couples to the value of this faithful and indissoluble bond of marriage, to the grace of this Sacrament in the face of human weakness, which provides today and everyday the most eloquent testimony. For this I wish to thank each one of you and entrust all married couples to the prayers of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who saw the human need of a young couple at Cana in Galilee and interceded for them with her timeless invitation *“Do whatever He (my Son) tells you”*^v.

ⁱ *Tobit 8: 9*

ⁱⁱ *Cf. Gaudium et Spes No. 47*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 1603*

^{iv} *Cf. CCC No. 1613*

^v *Jn. 2: 5*