

Homily. 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year.B. 6/7 October 2018.

On Friday 5th October Mum celebrated what was her 61st wedding anniversary, sadly without her husband and our father with us as he died suddenly on 24th September 28 years ago. It almost goes without saying then that I've always had the deepest respect for married partnerships in all of their joys and sorrows, holding families and family life in high regard because I came from such a marriage and am part of a family myself.

As a priest I've made it my habit not to enter into the private details of peoples' marriages and personal relationships unless they've invited me to do so which, thankfully, many have over the course of my 33 and a half years of ministry. I've done my best to honour this rule because I can't claim from my personal daily experience any direct hands-on knowledge of married living anymore than any of you, I believe, can claim personal knowledge and experience of what it's like to live as a Priest of our Church day by day over many decades. Yes, it's a joy when couples and families do let me into their lives and experiences, but I do not enter where I am not invited to tread.

It seems to me that Jesus held this rule, too, having little to say about families and marriage except what we've heard in this gospel text, and only saying this when He was publicly confronted by the Pharisees with the vexed issues of divorce and re-marriage. Given this context Jesus re-affirmed the original plan of God. He taught that people who enter into the covenant of marriage are to aspire and strive for the marriage endure forever, together making it both life-long and life-giving. This aspiration,

as we all well know, is always a work in progress, remaining so until the end of our days. As Christians in the Roman Catholic tradition we've always held to this teaching and goal understanding marriage and life-long partnerships as a vocation, a call to us from God that leads us through the years on our path of holiness. This is similar to striving to live faithfully as a Priest or vowed religious man or woman through trials and tribulations, joys and triumphs, a vocational call to holiness in the celibate way of life at the service of you, the Church and God's Kingdom.

We know that marriages and committed partnerships do break down, that families are split asunder causing heart-break, in the same way that we know that people in the Priesthood and Vowed life do leave their ministry, bringing sadness to their communities and congregations. We also know that this does happen despite even our very best efforts. Ours is a world ever on the way to the Kingdom, a world still needing complete redemption and final healing. We're all frail human beings, God's artwork always lying under His loving eyes and creative, merciful hands.

In the Pastor's Pen, which I ask you to take home and ponder over coming days, I've said a few things to you that are far from complete about our Churches understanding of marriage, divorce and re-marriage, three very distinct events that affect many of us. In this context of this homily though, there really there are too many subtle and important details to go much further tonight/today than I have already. Let my final words here on these matters be what I've said to you in the newsletter. If you have any questions and fears about your marriage and family relationships seek out a trusted Priest or Religious, inviting them into your

personal life. If you've chosen well they will tread gently, wisely and honestly on the most sacred ground of your vocation and pathway to holiness, which like that of the Priestly and Religious life must always remain central to our prayers and our constant care and support.