

Homily for World Marriage Day Mass, Feb. 19, 2011

I was recently at one of our Catholic High Schools conducting my annual visit to the campus. I usually attend some of the religion classes. I am accustomed to the students asking controversial questions about priestly celibacy, the role of women in the Church, and whether I had a girl friend in high school. This time I was startled when one of the students ask me, "What do you think about the end of the world?" I was not expecting that and ask, "Where did that come from?" I was told that there is a billboard along Stockton Boulevard announcing the end of the world will be on May 21, 2011. I quickly checked my calendar for that day. It looks like I will be in Colusa for the main event. I told the students, I am involved in sales, not management so I did not get that memo.

In all seriousness, I cautioned them against an apocalyptic algebra that always tries to calculate the divine timetable for the last celestial train leaving the station. At the same time, the restless anticipation for Christ's coming is not foreign to our faith. The Christian should live with a longing to meet Christ. This is why we were created. We are born with a desire to see the face of God. We know not the day nor the hour but we do know he will come. All our desires and all our hopes turn our eyes to the flame of all desires and the harbor of all hope, the Lord Jesus. The true nature of Christian faith is apocalyptic. We live our faith in the Messianic age that began when the Lord Jesus reigned over his kingdom hanging from the wood of the cross and will end when he comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

This apocalyptic longing is weaved into our Eucharistic prayers. At the memorial acclamation we sing in these or similar words, "When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus, until you come in glory." After praying the Our Father, the priest expresses the deep hope and desire of the Church when he prays, "In your mercy keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ."

This desire to meet the Lord transforms the nature of human love. Our faith in Jesus and our hope in meeting the Lord face to face lifts all human love to its true calling. It reveals the true beauty of love. That is why Pope Benedict tells us in his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, "Love looks to the eternal." (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, n.6)

In the Church, we recognize the married love of the couple vowed together in the sacrament of matrimony. We also acknowledge the celibate love of priests and religious. With good reason, we understand that priests and religious have foregone married love in order to wait with longing to meet Christ, the Beloved, in the kingdom. It can sometimes create the impression that married love is for those who just can't wait. This common misunderstanding of marriage as less than celibate love, overlooks the truly divine quality and apocalyptic character of marriage. Marriage, as an authentic Christian calling, anticipates the love we hope to find in Christ. The man and woman vowed together in married love points us to the kingdom that is to come. It is a foretaste of the banquet, the eternal wedding feast, that will begin when the bridegroom comes at an hour we do not know. In this light, married love and celibate love are not opposites. They are complementary expressions of the love that looks to the eternal.

That is why this evening's celebration makes the Church brim with joy as we celebrate the abundant faithful witness of so many Christian marriages. Your married love burns as a vigil lamp of faithful love until the faithful shepherd returns to give us the fullness of joy.

The gospel this evening, speaks about a radical love that gives charity in return for the scourge of human failings. The cheerful eagerness to turn the other cheek, to give one's tunic when asked for your cloak, to go two miles when pressed to go one, and never to turn your back on another. Married people know these demands. They have discovered the grace that responds with the heart of Christ.

The command to "be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" is not a call to technological perfect. Even most computer programs always have their bugs. We all have our flaws. The call of Christ is for that perfect love, the love that always looks to the eternal.

Those of you who have offered your marriage vows to the Church, your testimony gives us a glimmer of the glory to come. Be assured of our prayers. Pray that the celibate love of priests and religious may keep alive in us all that longing for our meeting with Christ Jesus. As Paul tells us in his letter to the Corinthians, "At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known."

So for those worried high school students in that class I visited, may our married love and celibate love assure them that today is not for worrying about what is to come but dedicating ourselves to the common task Christ has given us, "Love one another as I have loved you." (Jn. 13.34)