

EASTER 5 2025 All Souls' **LOVE ONE ANOTHER**

From our Gospel today: Jesus said to his disciples: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you..." (John 13. 34)

I would like to read a prayer from the Marriage Service (APBA p.665):

*All praise and blessing to you, God of love, creator of the universe,
Maker of man and woman in your likeness, source of blessing for married life.
All praise to you, for you have created courtship and marriage,
Joy and gladness, feasting and laughter, pleasure and delight.
May your blessing come in full upon this woman and this man.
May they know your presence in their joys and in their sorrows.
May they reach old age in the company of friends
And come at last to your eternal kingdom. Amen*

Today Emma and David Robinson will renew their marriage vows as they celebrate their Silver Wedding, 25 years of marriage. It is such a privilege for me to preside at marriages and baptisms and behold the union of a woman and a man so in love, and then the gift of children. And today we celebrate especially the gifts of Kirk and Primrose to Emma and David. The Church, in fact, is the place where every aspect of human life is embraced from before birth through to death and beyond. It is a life-time experience and not just a three-time one; I'm sure many of you know the old joke about '4-wheel Christians': they're the ones who come just three times on 4 wheels. The first is a pram for baptism, the second a limo for marriage and the third: yes, you guessed it! Another long vehicle.

The thing that really struck me about these great spiritual and sacramental moments in our Christian lives is that they imitate the life of the Godhead itself: indeed, St Paul calls us to 'be imitators of God as his beloved children and live in love as Christ loved us' (Eph 5. 1-2). Jesus speaks about his Father's house where many dwelling places are prepared for us (the old version is more generous: many mansions!) and in our human lives we all know what the joy of home-coming means; how much more the joy of heaven. The Godhead dwells in a family of mutual love as we are called to do, loving one another as Christ has loved us. Ours is the only religion where the mutual indwelling of All-Creating, All-Redeeming and Sanctifying Love: Three in One and One in Three, is the very foundation of our faith. The Trinity is even described as 'dance', in Greek: *perichoresis*. I hope that one day we might have a Eucharist which will be a Re-affirmation of Marriage, Single and Family Life and invite many friends, followed by a festive lunch. Who knows? Even dancing?!

I have said before and doubtless will say again that the Christian Gospel is an invitation to fall in love. Christianity has often been described as 'the School of

Love'. It is the setting of God's love affair with the world. God is in love with us and wants us to love him in return, and our brothers and sisters in this world, made in God's image. Jesus says just a little further in John 14 (vs. 23), "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them". When you love someone very much, you want that person to stay with you. One of the first things I said to my wife before I officially proposed to her was, "I want to be with you and live with you for the rest of my life". I used to find it very hard to go home sometimes after going out to dinner together or going to a movie; I wanted it to last forever! I can remember doing crazy things like driving right across Adelaide to see her after a meeting, at 10.30 at night instead of going home to bed. I'd tap on her bedroom window (no mobiles in those days!) and she would come out and sit in the car for a couple of hours. We had many more late nights back then than we do now. But in marriage it is so good to be under the same roof together – to *make our home* together to use the words of Christ.

Today we will also acknowledge the blessing of Emma's and David's rings, When a man presents the woman he loves with a little box, beautifully wrapped and tied, he hopes that she will open it and, when she finds the diamond ring inside, that she will place it on her finger as a sign that their love is mutually committed with a view to a lifelong relationship. She is effectively saying to this offering, in token of his love, "I love you back". Wedding rings then seal this love until death.

The Bible refers to Christ as the bridegroom and to us, his Church, as the bride. We are called as with the ring, to wear the bond of his love for everyone to see. There is only one kind of security worth having and that is the abiding love of the God who makes a home with us – for this is heaven.

FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP REFLECTION

1. Think of the 7 sacraments of the church and in their symbols discover more of the movement of God's three-fold love – outward signs of invisible grace.
2. How do you 'wear' Christ to the world, let your light 'shine'?
3. How do we get '4-wheel Christians' more intrigued about the whole package of faith and life?
4. Take some time to consider and celebrate the sacraments that you have received in your Christian pilgrimage. End with a prayer of thanksgiving.