

From The Pastor

This weekend we acknowledge those couples who are celebrating milestone anniversaries. I want to offer my personal congratulations to all these couples for their witness and fidelity to the Sacrament of Marriage. I thank them for the witness of their personal love for each other, and for the witness to stand before us and ask the Lord's blessing. To seek such a blessing acknowledges that they are dependent on more than themselves. As a vocation, marriage is God's gift and is dependent upon God's continual care. Through the trials and tensions of married life, a couple or family is not left to their own designs for survival. The strength and persistence of marital love is constantly supported by the love of the Father, who is its origin and its gift.

May the Lord Jesus bless and strengthen all couples coming forward this weekend, and all married couples. May the Lord inspire patience and forgiveness, mutual love and respect, and bless each of you with His abundance all the days of your life.

Today also celebrates and honors the vocation of the Priesthood. In the last few years Priesthood Sunday has been sponsored and supported by...honestly I don't know who started the idea, but it has become a national opportunity to honor and support those who serve the Church through priestly ministry. Like marriage, the priest, once ordained, is not left to his own designs. He is constantly supported by the grace of God and the prayerful support of the faith community. This grace and prayer is as important to a priest as the love and support shared by spouses.

Ministry is always a privilege and a gift. The Church doesn't owe me the right to minister to its people. Love is always a gift. It is never owed. Even after years of marriage, love remains the freely given gift of one person to the other. It is not a right or an entitled expectation. Love given and received feeds itself and grows. Love expected and taken for granted withers and fades. In ministry, the priest shares himself out of love for the service of God's people. Like the daily life of marriage, the priest may offer his love very smoothly and generously, or he may do so haltingly with resistance and hesitation. His generous ministry is dependent on the generous love and support that he receives through the grace of God, as well as the love, affirmation, and support of those he serves.

I am very grateful for the privilege and gift to serve as a priest. It is not always easy, but it is always blest. As I like to say, so much more happens than what I do. I know that this is God's grace. I am also grateful for those who support and encourage me along the way. None of us are called to live the Christian life alone. We are all to be loved and supported by the grace of God revealed to us by the love and support of one another.

May married couples and priests alike know the generous grace sufficient to their call and vocation. May our common support and encouragement only serve to advance the Kingdom of God through the joy of God's people.

Perhaps this occasion gives us the opportunity to express our gratitude to God for all we have in love. In the fast pace and rhythms of life, it is so easy to forget to be grateful. I believe it is most often present, but can get so buried under the tensions of life. Gratitude is essential to staying actively in touch with the gift of love. Do we remain actively grateful to God for his constant love and providence in our lives? Does our gratitude swell or wane depending on the blessing of a day or time? God's love and goodness never pauses, rests, or takes time off to recharge. Our trials or difficulties are not God's doing, nor God's desire for us. In the midst of painful trials, God remains ever-present. At such times, it can be most difficult to see the Lord, but he is there all the same.

The gospel today calls us to love God with all that we are, and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Where does love go in the movement of a day that causes us to forget who we are in God? Where is the love in the scholar of the law who poses this question to Jesus? He obviously thinks he is doing the right thing, but it is clear he is doing it for the wrong reason. This scholar is trying to justify himself while he traps Jesus in his speech. Why do people act this way? What do they hope to gain by their manipulative control and power seeking games?

We forget who we are and who it is that loves us. We are God's children, and we are loved by God. Knowing we are loved by God would most reasonably cause us to love ourselves. Because we live with the limitations and consequences of sin, we quickly learn to reject ourselves and others. Living with criticism, rejection, abuse, and hurts of various kinds we learn to not love ourselves because we are not loved or valued as we should be by others. Because of our human experience, we learn to not trust the love of God. This is why these two commandments are in fact one. To love God is to love ones self, and to love ones neighbor. To reject love in one of these places is to hinder it in all three. To love ones self is an act of faith.

It is not dependent on good looks, wealth, or position, or freedom from human rejection. Faith trusts that you are valued and loved by the One who created you. You are loved and loveable. This is an act of faith in God's love for you. From this place, love will find its way to God and to the neighbor.

Father John Esper