

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✕ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

God, in His mercy, gave His Word through Moses that men might know Him aright. St. Matthew records the Pharisees testing the Lord by twisting the Words of God in an attempt to make them mean something different than what God said. That is the nature of fallen, sinful men. Sinners are uncomfortable with God's Word. That's because it condemns their favorite sins. It condemns what they believe is right. It condemns their lives.

Rather than conform to the Word of God, they refuse to hear it. That's the clear mark of a fallen, sinful man. They refuse to learn the Scriptures. They pretend the Scriptures don't exist. They lead their lives as if God doesn't see their sins. But God does see. And accept it or not, all men will be judged by His Word. The Holy Scriptures are clear, they are not hard to understand. But what Scripture clearly teaches, sinners reject.

So the Pharisees sought easy divorces. God, the Prophet Malachi writes, hates divorce. The first divorce was the separation of Adam and Eve from God. They did not keep the Word of God. And so it is that marriage, designed and instituted by God before there was sin, designed and instituted by God to be a model of the love of Christ and His Church, that blessed institution is corrupted by our fallen world.

We live in a time when the marriage God instituted, the marriage between one chaste man and one chaste woman until death do they part, is attacked and rejected by our sinful society. Even the most basic truths – that God made them male and female – are rejected by sinful men.

So St. Matthew records the Lord's rebuke of those who would ignore the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. He rebukes them by quoting those very Scriptures, for they are the only source of Truth. The Lord said: "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?"

The only True God, the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is the God who speaks and it is. By His Word were the worlds created. He is the God that brings forth from nothing, the God who brings life out of death, holiness out of corruption, faith out of unbelief. He is the God who made male and female. He is the God that instituted marriage, even the marriage that we witness this day.

But more, He is the God that makes all things new. He who once created recreates. That is His promise. This perverse world will be destroyed by fire, and He will make all things new in a new creation.

Ashley and Josh, you are part of that new creation now. For you are baptized. And in Holy Baptism God drowns the old man in you, and He brings forth from the font a new man, a new woman, born from above in Christ, washed into holiness and purity and righteousness. He does it by the forgiveness of your sins. In Christ, all your sins are forgiven. And in baptism God made you His child. He makes you new.

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And that forgiveness, Christ's forgiveness, you received again this day, as you knelt to receive Holy Absolution. The forgiveness won by the Blood of Christ is yours. He forgives all your sins. He removes your transgressions from you. And you start anew. You are, rightly understood, His new creation. And in holy marriage, He will soon join you together anew.

Today, in holy matrimony, He binds you together as one, one new couple, husband and wife, a reflection of Christ and His Church, vested in the white robe of His righteousness, filled with His Spirit. For He is the True Bridegroom, and you are His Church, His Holy Bride. You are wed to one another until death do you part, but you are wed to Him for eternity. He is the center and source of your love.

So today, by God's grace, you who are two will be made one flesh. By Word and prayer, God sanctifies your marriage and makes you new. The love you have for one another is an expression of the love God pours out upon you. And although the love of sinners falters, God's love does not falter. His love is boundless, His mercies never fail, they are new every morning.

That does not mean that marriage is easy. Yes, you will exchange vows before God and before this congregation. But you still have your flesh. And the old man that is in you will daily try to control you. He will try to keep you from God's Word. He will try to keep you and your family from church, where God's Gifts of Word and Sacrament are freely given. That old man is selfish. He cares little for the needs and concerns of others.

But the answer to that selfishness is Christ. He willingly, freely, gave His all. He gave His life, for you, that believing in Him you receive the forgiveness, restoration and life that He alone can give. By His Living Spirit He gives you faith, faith that trusts in Christ.

That you remain faithful, God has placed His Holy Spirit in you, to lead you, to comfort you, to counsel you, to bring you here, to this altar, to the very place that God delivers what He promises. And that promise, the promise of forgiveness, salvation, and everlasting life, He offers to all those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

In life things do not always get better. They often get worse, for this world is spiraling downward into sin and apostasy. You will not always be richer, there may be days when you are poorer. Health is fleeting, sickness comes to many, and often that sickness brings great difficulty.

And yet you will soon vow, that is you will soon promise, even in the face of poverty, sickness, disagreement, even on days that you don't get your own way, to love and to cherish one another till death do you part. And that vow you have chosen to make this day before God and this congregation.

That promise, that vow, is impossible to keep without God. But with God, even the hard parts of life, the difficult days, the days of uncertainty and doubt, can be great blessings, blessings for you and for your children, as you live out the new life that God has given you. God is faithful. He keeps His promises.

Josh and Ashley, may God, in His mercy, grant that to you.

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