



## Wedding of Peter Carswell and Megan Butler



**Date:** Saturday, February 18, 2017 | **Season:** Ordinary Time before Easter | **Year:** A

**First Reading:** Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

**Responsorial Psalm:** 145 | **Response:** Psalm 145:13

**Second Reading:** Colossians 3:12-17

**Gospel Acclamation:** John 13:34

**Gospel Reading:** John 15:9-12

**Preached at:** the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

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**Y**ou are all welcome to this Church of the Holy Trinity. We are all gathered here in this Church, from I think, places all over the globe, to share in this joyous occasion together and to celebrate the love that Megan and Peter both share for each other.

The readings you have chosen all speak about love. In the first reading there is the image of a threefold cord that remains unbroken. This is the image of love's strength and of its binding character. This three-fold cord is made up of the hopes and desires of Megan, the hopes and desires of Peter, and the hopes and desires of God for your life together, and it is the uniting force of love within this marriage in which there will be three persons, Megan, Peter and God.

Some might question why you would want to include God in your marriage together? It is because an indissoluble Christian marriage demands the personal fidelity of the spouses, but such a fidelity matures and gains new strength only in the lonely decisions that each of you can ultimately make alone before God, before whom both of you will pronounce your marriage vows. You both recognize that the strength of your relationship is founded upon the love of each other and your love together for God.

In the second reading that we heard, this strong love is placed alongside the other virtues that can complement, preserve and strengthen your love. These are virtues I know you both desire, cultivate and esteem in each other: compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience, forgiveness, peacefulness, and gratitude. These are all fruits of a loving relationship with each other and with God. The life of a Christian, indeed of anyone in relationship with God, is a life spent

in practicing and perfecting these virtues. As husband and wife, you will take your friendship to the deepest and most profound level. As we celebrate your love for each other, you will have the duty and the desire to find new ways of loving each other each day. As you grow older what may initially have attracted you to each other will fade, but that is the opportunity for you to see more deeply into each other's souls and love each other more perfectly. You will find it helpful to have a joint life project – something that can keep bringing you together and helping you to be creative and fruitful. Alongside any children that we all hope the Lord will bless you with, the pursuit of these virtues, and a relationship with God can be the uniting force that constantly allows you to renew your love for each other.

Christians have long believed that human persons bear the *imago Dei*, the image of God. May you each in your own way, strive every day to be that image of God for each other: to light and illumine, to help and protect, to support and encourage, to love and be loved. In this relationship, God can only act in and through you. Allow yourselves to witness and testify to God's love for you and for each other.

Finally in the Gospel you have chosen, we see the example of how to love, in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ shows the world how to love in loving his Father and keeping his commandments. Jesus Christ, is the supreme model of one who loves, and I know that he is known to each of you personally. The commandments that you have kept in your lives will this day grow to include the vows that you are about to declare. You both have earnestly prepared yourselves and desire to be married before your family, your friends and God. Your love for each other is so strong that you cannot keep it to yourselves. Love is in fact infectious. When people see other people in love, their spirits are lifted. Indeed, as I look out today to you all here, I can only see smiles and joyful expressions. It is in this context of pure love and total freedom, supported by friends and family, that you are going to declare your love for each other in the form of a Vow.

Vows are sacred and solemn oaths, not lightly undertaken. In just a moment, we will all hear you pronounce your wedding vows. Just as God made a covenant with his people, you are making a covenant with each other. Your words do not just echo through this church this afternoon, but they will echo into eternity. We live in an age where autonomy and freedom are seen to be absolute values. The paradox of this is that the greatest gift one can give is to freely give up their

freedom – to bind oneself to another for life – and yet this is seen often in our culture as a gift too impossible to contemplate. This gift only makes sense if it is done, as you are doing, out of love. Your decision today to enter into a Christian Marriage is a powerful counter-cultural witness to the grace of love.

When you say “until death do us part”, you are vowing your freedom and fidelity to each other, and to help each other and love each other every day for the rest of your lives, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. Christian marriage is not imposed upon persons from the outside. It can only ever be freely chosen. Chesterton once said that “It is the nature of love to bind itself, and the institution of marriage merely paid the average person the compliment of taking them at their word.” I do not like it when people say that their wedding day was the highlight of their married life together. If that were so, then everything else from now on would be downhill! No – not at all! The wedding day is a beginning, a special moment to be sure, but one that captures the great, glorious and generous desires you have for each other. In this moment, when you are enamoured with each other and surrounded by your loved ones, you choose to declare your love and your desire to never be apart again. The Church then serves as a reminder of this moment.

In declaring that marriage is lifelong, she does not add any burden or weight, but merely stands as testament to the vows that you yourselves make. Of course your vows are not just words – but rather they are words that represent actions. St Ignatius – a favourite in this place – said that Love shows itself more in deeds than in words. You have chosen beautiful words to represent your love – but I am confident that they will be translated into even more amazing actions. You have chosen Jesus Christ as your model of how to love, and his actions will surely guide you. I know that you are both part of regular cell and bible-study groups. This is a wonderful way of including Jesus, who is the Word, and the Church community in your lives. As you study the Scriptures together, and reflect on your own lives and experiences, you will be inspired by the Holy Spirit to love concretely, and to love well.

So we rejoice together that you have found in each other your soul-mate, your best friend, your companion, and we give thanks to God for the families that have nurtured you both, and raised you so responsibly, and modelled for you how to love so freely and generously, in good times and in bad.

In closing, I have only two pieces of advice.

The first is that you never forget these four phrases when dealing with each other. They are very simple, 'Please', 'Thank you', 'Sorry' and 'I love you'. In always saying 'please' you will protect yourself from becoming overbearing or entitled. In always saying 'thank you' you will save yourself from becoming selfish as you renew your dependence on each other. In always saying 'sorry' quickly when you are wrong or mistaken, you will be able to give the other the gift of forgiving you, which will lead to harmony and peace. In always saying 'I love you' you will be reminded to not just say the words, but to show your love in concrete ways.

The second piece of advice is that you always remember to pray together. With God nothing is impossible, and what God has joined together, no person can divide.

And so, as in recent years, and now for the rest of your lives, you are, with God, each other's Number One priority and concern. I pray that this new married relationship that you will forge will continue to deepen and strengthen, and bear much fruit.

On behalf of everyone here, I wish you well and pray that God will seal your love and sanctify you both and bless you and your family abundantly, this day and every day.

Amen.

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