



Wedding of Matthew John Fagri and Claudia Rodrigues Teles



Date: Friday, April 21, 2023 | **Season:** Easter | **Year:** A

First Reading: Genesis 2:18-24

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 103:1-2, 8 and 13, 17-18a | **Response:** Psalm 103:18a

Second Reading: Philippians 4:4-9

Gospel Acclamation: 1 John 4:16

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:1-12a

Preached at: Church of the Beatitudes in Zwavelpoort in the Archdiocese of Pretoria, South Africa.

You are all welcome to this glorious place of great joy and hope for the union we are about to witness. We are all gathered in this inimitable venue to share in this joyous occasion together and to celebrate the love that Matthew and Claudia both share for each other and to witness them being bonded forever in marriage.

They say a wedding is a day, but a marriage is a lifetime. And it is your marriage which we are focusing on today. Perhaps it is easy to give and to serve for today. But what you are about to commit yourself to, is a lifelong commitment to give and to serve, to love and be loved, to forgive and to say sorry not just today, but in all your days together from now until forever. And I'm sure I speak for everyone here when I say we hope they are long and many.

Now both of you Matthew and Claudia, have different strengths and abilities, and yet, miraculously, God has called you together to complement and to help each other through life. Your gifts, your differences, are not threats to you both, but rather opportunities to feel and be completed. St Ignatius of Loyola once said that love is shown more in deeds than in words. Always remember that love is a deed, it is an act of service to the other, a self-service for the other, a gesture to the other. The first gesture is precisely that departure from your families and your previous life, to come together and start a new life together, a new family together. As we heard at the end of the first reading, 'that is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.'

In that first reading from the book of Genesis, we heard a creation account of how Eve was formed from Adam's rib. Adam (which is the Hebrew word for a human person) was made from the ground – which in Hebrew is called Adamah. In fact this soil, this Adama was the same stuff that all the rest of creation came from, all the animals and other creatures. So in a real sense everything, all of us and creation, are all related. When I was speaking with Claudia, she said how much she enjoyed discovering and understanding the Bible, so forgive me if I talk a little bit at length about the readings they chose. Since these readings were specifically chosen by Matthew and Claudia, I'd like to think that their message resonates deeply with them and I want to unpack them for you.

We heard in this creation account how Adam was asked to give names to all of creation, but he failed to recognize a helper from those he named, and so he felt very alone. And we're told that God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, so God caused Adam to fall asleep (just in case men might claim dominion over women – we should remember that the man slept through it all as God saved his best for last) - and so God created Eve, from we're told, Adam's rib. But as Adam will exclaim, this is “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” – Eve is made of the same stuff that constitutes Adam. Now you might be wondering why his rib. Why not his head or his feet? Well, I think it's to prove that she is equal in dignity to the man, neither below him or above him. And that is one of the truths about men and women that is being conveyed in this reading. That men and women are created equal as persons. But there's some Sumerian world-play going on here as well. You see in that language, rib is the same word as life, and so I think the authors wanted to explain that life comes from life. We give thanks this afternoon for the life that both of you give each other and for the life that will no doubt result from your love of each other.

The truth we can learn from this reading then, is that it is only together, in their maleness and femaleness, that Adam and Eve convey the full image of God, and it is only together that Matthew and Claudia can become that fullest image and likeness of God for themselves, each other and for their friends and family. It is also worth noting that Adam was the one that gave things names, and I notice that Matthew and Claudia have done some renaming of their own this afternoon, as we look at the Brides-men and Grooms-women. Matthew and Claudia you are

already emphasizing the equality of men and women in your choices today, and I pray that your love and respect for each other will be a beacon to many in your lives.

The second truth being shared in this reading, however, is that men and women were created as different persons specifically as part of God's plan. In marriage, these two great truths - the equality of persons and the necessity of both sexes - together flourish as a foundational part of God's plan for humanity, and concretely in the plan God has had for you both since the beginning.

But let's leave Genesis and look at Psalm 103, which Joshua read so well. In this psalm, we are reminded of God's infinite love and mercy. Matthew and Claudia, as you enter into this holy sacrament of marriage, may you always remember that your love for one another should be grounded in your love of God together. It is this love that will sustain you and guide you through the joys and challenges of your marriage. Always remember that God loves you and offers you his mercy. Because mercy is the shape love takes when confronted by a sinner. If God is prepared to forgive you – I beg you, please be prepared to forgive each other, and to love each other always. The life of a Christian, indeed of anyone in relationship with God, is a life spent in practicing how to love. 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 – one cannot look like Michelle Pfeiffer for ever, no matter what that song says - but growing old together 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, I believe, to have a joint life project – something that can keep bringing you together and helping you to be creative and fruitful. Alongside your children, the pursuit of love, and a relationship with God in a common and living faith in your parish in Adelaide, can be the uniting force that constantly allows you to renew your love for each other. But as I told you on Wednesday, never let religion get in the way of your relationship with God. You are called to love each other as you are, because God already loves you as you are. And because God loves you, God has made each of you the means of each other's salvation. Your vocation in marriage will be realized in how you save each other's souls and help each other to relax into and rejoice in God's loving presence in your lives together.

In his letter to the Philippians, Saint Paul of course encourages us to rejoice always, and to let our gentleness be evident to all. He reminds us that we should not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present our requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4-9). This is an important lesson for marriage, as it reminds us that we must always turn to God in times of trouble or distress. Through prayer and thanksgiving, we can find the peace and strength to overcome any obstacle that comes our way. Finally, in St Matthew's Gospel, we hear the congratulatory words of Jesus as he begins his famous Sermon on the Mount. He speaks of the blessedness of those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. These are the qualities too, that make a marriage strong and enduring.

As you stand here today, you are making a commitment to love and to cherish each other, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do you part. This commitment requires the virtues that Jesus speaks of in the Beatitudes. You will need humility to admit when you are wrong and to ask for forgiveness. You will need compassion to comfort each other in times of sorrow and to extend kindness to each other even when it's difficult. You will need purity of heart to stay faithful to each other and to resist the temptations that life may bring. And you will need the courage to stand up for what is right and to defend each other in the face of adversity.

But marriage is not just about virtues and commitments. It's also about the joy and adventure that come with falling in love. Let us cast our minds back to the beginning of this ceremony when you entered with your friends and family to songs you chose especially for today. We heard "Riptide" by Vance Joy which speaks to the exhilaration and excitement of being swept away by love, perhaps by a love that scared at first but leaves a lump in his throat out of concern for her. In your marriage, you may at times feel like you are caught in a riptide, with the waves crashing around you and the currents pulling you under. But I believe that as long as you hold on to each other and keep your eyes on the shore, you will make it through the rough waters together. And then there's "Wild" by John Legend and Gary Clark Jr. This song reminds us that life is an adventure, and that love is a wild and unpredictable journey, from the outermost rings of Saturn

into one's very heart. There will be moments of laughter and moments of tears in this journey together. There will be highs and lows, twists and turns. But if you keep your faith in each other and in God, you will make it through those times of wilderness hand in hand.

Let the vows you pronounce to each other this afternoon always be the route back to each other.

We must remember that 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 place 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, as we heard in the first reading. The Church then serves as a reminder to you of this moment, and as a helper to you in your commitment.

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. You have chosen Jesus Christ as your model of how to love, and His actions and beatitudes will surely guide you.

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. We give thanks that young and old in the family are here together to witness this moment.

In closing, I have only two pieces of advice – now one side of the family has heard this already but I ask you to bear with me – after all I would be inconsistent if I offered different advice. [But I’m going to need some help with this, so if I can ask my helper to please come up and assist me. Thank you Javier.]

The first piece of advice is that you never forget these four phrases when dealing with each other. They are very simply, “Please”, “Thank you”, “Sorry”, and “I love you”. These words may seem small, but they have tremendous power to heal, to comfort, and to strengthen your relationship. In always saying “please” you will protect yourself from becoming overbearing or entitled. Saying “please” shows respect for each other and a willingness to work together. In always saying ‘thank you’ you will save yourself from becoming selfish as you renew your dependence on each other. Saying “thank you” acknowledges the sacrifices you both make for each other and expresses gratitude. Saying “I’m sorry” shows humility and a desire to make things right. In always saying ‘sorry’ quickly when you are wrong or mistaken, you will be able to give the other gift of forgiving you, which will lead to harmony, peace and greater unity. In always saying ‘I love you’ you will be reminded to not just say the words, but to show your love in concrete ways. saying “I love you” is the most powerful affirmation of all. Love is what brought you here today, and love is what will sustain you for the rest of your lives.

The second piece of advice is that you always remember to pray together. For with God nothing is impossible, and what God has joined together, no person can divide. Matthew, I’m not sure if all your friends are really turning green, but

we all hope you will not come unstuck. You have chosen the light. And Claudia brings out the best in you. You set Claudia on fire, as she does, I'm sure you.

So, Matthew and Claudia, as you embark on this wild, wild, wild and wonderful journey together, with God, remember to hold on tight, keep your eyes on the shore, and never forget to say "please," "thank you," "I'm sorry," and "I love you." And just in case you've gone over to the dark side and become completely Australian, Javier will show you those words in Australian too. Javier...

May God bless your union and fill your lives with blessed joy, peace, mutual understanding and love.

Amen.

[* A dispensation was granted to solemnise the Wedding at *Inimitable*.]

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