

HOMILETICS

• D. TITHER, C.S.S.R.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (Oct. 6th.)

MARRIAGE: SYMBOL OF UNION OF CHRIST AND CHURCH.

Our Lord was once invited to a marriage feast at a place called Cana in Galilee. He accepted the invitation.

What a gréât honour this was for the newly wedded couple! On this happy day—on the day of their marriage, Our Lord was their guest.

Many young men and women are at present planning their marriage. They look forward to the day when they will stand before God's altar and give themselves to each other in holy Matrimony. Such a young couple might well say: "How wonderful it would be on our wedding day if Christ were our guest. We will have many guests of course, but how much happier we would be, how much holier our marriage would be if Christ were there. We would like Christ to be at our marriage just as He was at Cana."

But if that Catholic couple are married before the priest, then Christ will be there. Christ will be there because He has made marriage something holy. He has made marriage a sacrament, and Christ is present in every sacrament.

Dear brethren, if you stood before God's priest and exchanged your marriage vows, then you received the sacrament of marriage.

Christ came to you on that day with a special grace. He knew the love in your hearts for one another. He heard you pronounce your

marriage vows. He saw you pledge yourselves to each other until death. He was there and He blessed your marriage.

And when you walked away from God's altar to begin your new life together, you did not go alone. Christ went with you. Through the sacrament of marriage He would be your companion in the years of married life. Through the sacrament of marriage He would give you His special graces or special helps to live a holy married life. He would help you to deepen your love for one another. He would help you sacrifice yourselves for your children and for one another during the years ahead.

Dear brethren, how grateful we should be that God has made marriage a sacrament. How grateful we should be that Christ is present at a Catholic marriage. How grateful we should be that He offers His special graces to married couples. I say this because marriage is not easy. One would gain the impression from many modern movies and books that marriage is a kind of a dream, that it is easy for a man and woman to live together and love one another.

But ask anyone who has lived a successful married life and they will tell you that marriage is not so easy. They will tell you that love is not just a dream but that it is something that requires effort and self-sacrifice. For example, as time goes by the man will begin to realise that his wife is human and has her faults. Perhaps he did not notice these faults before and now he must practice more patience and gentleness. And the wife will discover that her husband is not as perfect as she thought—he too has his faults and these are not always easy to bear. So, very early in marriage, mutual tolerance and patience are called for. And if this is lacking, discord and unhappiness can so easily enter and threaten the marriage.

Nor is it always easy to accept the children that God might send: to work month after month and year after year for the welfare of one's partner and children.

And certainly it is not easy to live a holy married life in the modern world—a world that challenges the very sanctity of marriage; a world that identifies love with lust and selfishness; a world that praises sinful methods of birth control and has no complaint against adultery.

Yes certainly there will be difficulties. Marriage demands courage and virtue. But Christ will always be there through the sacrament of Matrimony. He will always give the graces needed to bear these difficulties, to love one another and one's children with true love.

Catholic married couples are challenged on the day of their marriage to love one another as Christ loves His Church. Just as Christ gave Himself in true love to His Church, they must give themselves to one another. In order to do this Christ guarantees His help through the Sacrament of Matrimony.

This help will be given if the married couple ask for it in prayer. Hence many have the beautiful practice of praying together, even of praying together each day with their children. Many too have the beautiful practice of celebrating their anniversary of marriage by attending Holy Mass.

Never forget that Christ is present at marriage; that He offers His special help in every difficulty of married life and He will certainly grant this help if husband and wife ask for it in prayer.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (Oct. 13th.)

PRAYER—KEEPING CONTACT WITH CHRIST.

The Holy Church tells us that the official worship we give to God when we pray together in church is the best of all prayers. We call such prayer 'liturgical prayer.' This is the case especially when we gather around the altar to offer the Holy Mass together. Thus the second Vatican Council said this: "Every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ and of His Body the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others.

However, we can't always be in church and so it is necessary to pray sometimes by ourselves. Again the Vatican Council tells us that liturgical prayers should not be the only ones we say. We should also say private prayers and not forget what St. Paul said: "Pray without

ceasing.” (Thess. 5:17. Const. Liturgy no. 12). And of course we should remember the command of Our Lord Himself: “You ought always to pray and not to lose heart.” (Luke 18:1)

If we don't think of God and talk to Him in prayer, then the danger is that we will forget him. If we don't recall the fact that God watches us and loves us every moment of the day, then we may easily neglect Him. We may easily become like the rich man in the gospel. He became so interested in things that pleased him that he forgot God. He forgot to pray and God called him a fool.

Through the Sacrament of Baptism we have been united to Christ in a wonderful way. We became His brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of God Our Father.

When teaching us to pray Our Lord told us to say: “Our Father.” And this shows us one very important aspect of prayer: it is speaking to God Our Father. Yes, in our prayer we simply speak to God; and in our private prayers we can speak to God in any words and in any language we like.

But if we don't speak to our friends there is also something wrong and we may lose their friendship. So too, we must often speak in prayer to God Our Father: we must often speak to God Who is our special Friend.

What are we supposed to do when we pray? How are we going to speak to God? We should simply be like a child speaking to his father. A child thinks his father is the best man in the world and he praises him. When his father gives him something he thanks him. When he has done something wrong he tells his father he is sorry. And when he wants something he goes to his father and asks him for it confidently.

So too, when we pray, when we speak to God we should praise Him, thank Him for all the things He has given us, tell Him we are sorry for our sins and ask Him for all the things we need for our bodies and souls. We don't have to use fixed formulas, we can just use our own words and speak from our hearts. If we do use formulas or written prayers, we should make sure we understand them.

Also the Church's liturgy will give us helpful ideas about our prayer. It will suggest things to talk to God about. For example, a man who remembers his baptism will be prompted to thank God for it and to ask God for the grace to live like a good child of God. A man who has been to Communion at Mass in the morning, when he remembers it during the day, will praise God for His goodness and speak loving words to Him. A woman who offered herself to God at Mass in the morning will be prompted to renew that offering during the day when she feels tired or disappointed.

The best prayers we offer to God are liturgical prayers—those prayers we pray together in church, especially the Holy Mass. But we should also pray outside the church. We should remember God at different times during the day at home, at work, when we are traveling. At these times we can and should speak to Him in private prayer. Let us be faithful to the Church's strong recommendation that we offer private prayers to God every day.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (Oct. 20th) ASKING HIS HELP

God is our Father and we are His children. However, even though we are children of God we are weak children. We are like a little child in a family. He is completely dependent on his parents for the things he needs.

We need God's help, and God wants us to ask for that help in prayer.

It is natural for us to ask God for favours and assistance. In so many things that we do we realize that our own powers are limited. We soon come to a point where our own efforts fail and success depends on circumstances over which we have no control. Then it is that we feel the need to pray. A farmer knows that he may till his soil and sow his seed, but he can't make the sun shine or the rain fall when it is needed. A mother whose child is very sick knows that the doctor will give all the medicines he can. But he can't make them cure the child. So she goes on her knees and prays.

We want to do good, to keep God's law, but like St. Paul we feel weak, we feel an inclination to be lazy, to be unkind, to be dishonest. And if we are going to succeed in conquering these inclinations to sin, we must seek the help of God.

Then there is Satan—the devil who hates us and wants us to become God's enemies. He tempts us to sin and so often his temptations are difficult to overcome. It is never easy to say "no" to the temptations of the devil. He is clever. He is cunning. He is a powerful enemy. St. Peter warns us that our "adversary the devil as a roaring lion goes about seeking someone to devour." (1 Pet. 5.8.). He also warns us that we must resist him. But we can't resist him alone—we need God's help.

We need God's help before we can perform any supernatural act. That is without God's help we cannot love God. We cannot overcome temptation, we cannot even repent the sins we have committed. "Without Me," said Our Lord, "you can do nothing." (Jn. 15.5).

Therefore we must ask for God's help in prayer. And God wants us to ask. God wants us to be like Christ His Son. When He needed help, Our Lord went on His knees and prayed. For example, before He began His long and weary missionary journeys He prayed for forty days. At the Last Supper He prayed. From the supper room He entered the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed. He prayed for the strength He would need in the terrible hours of His Passion which was now beginning. When he hung on the Cross in agony He prayed.

We need God's help every day, and we should try to pray every day. And when we do pray, let us pray with confidence. God is our loving Father, and like any father He wants to give good things to His children. "Ask and you shall receive," He says, "seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you." (Mt. 7.7.).

Above all we should pray with confidence because when we pray, we do not pray alone. Our Lord has done much more than merely tell us to pray. He has done much more than give us an example of prayer by praying Himself. Through the grace of our baptism He is actually in us and with us. When we pray, He prays with us. Every

prayer of ours is also a prayer of Christ. When we pray it is not just our weak voice that our Heavenly Father hears. He hears the voice of Christ His Divine Son who prays with us and for us. Such a prayer is surely powerful. Such a prayer will surely be heard. "If you abide in Me," said Christ, "you shall ask whatever you will and it shall be done to you." (Jn. 15.5).

We should pray every day, and we should pray with confidence. We should pray like Matthew Talbot. He was once a terrible drunkard, a slave to drink. But when he prayed he overcame this terrible vice and lived a holy life. "For the first time in my life I really prayed," he said, "and God came to my assistance.

TWENTY FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (Oct. 27th)

CHRIST THE KING

During the Spanish Civil War a group of soldiers and Nationalist civilians took refuge in a fortress called the Alcazar. They were commanded by a certain Colonel Moscado. However, the Communists seized the Colonel's 17 year old son. They told Moscado that unless he surrendered the fort his son would be shot. They let the boy speak to his father on the telephone. Moscado knew that he could not surrender. He knew that he must hold the fortress at all costs. Nor could he hand over his group to certain death at the hands of the Communists. And so he said to his son on the phone: "My dear son, I order you to die like a hero calling out: 'Long live Spain! Long live Christ the King!'"

To-day we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. To-day we proudly salute Christ and say: "Long live Christ our King." And to-day we rejoice because Christ our King lives and reigns with us in the Church.

Jesus Christ is indeed a King. "All authority has been given Me in heaven and on earth," He said. (Mt. 28:18) And to-day's gospel

repeats His stirring words to Pilate: "Yes, I am a King. For this I was born, for this I came into the world." (Jn. 18:37)

Yes He came to reign. He reigns now in the hearts of His millions of followers throughout the world. Other kings are perhaps remembered, especially if they were good and kind; if they were close to their subjects. But Christ our King is the Kindest and Most loving of all Kings, because he died on the Cross and rose again for each one of His subjects. "Greater love than this no man has," says St. John, "than that he should lay down his life for his friend." (15:13)

And certainly no king was ever closer to his subjects than Christ, because the King has given us His grace or a share of his Divine life through the Sacrament of Baptism. He strengthens that life in our souls in every sacrament—especially in the Holy Eucharist. In this greatest of all the sacraments His Sacred Flesh becomes our food and His Blood becomes our drink.

To-day in the Holy Church our King really lives and reigns. To-day He speaks to us through the Holy Father the Pope, through our bishop. "He who hears you hears Me," said our Lord. (Lk. 10:16) Through the Pope and the bishops He commands us. He speaks to us also every time we go to Holy Mass. Because then we listen to the Epistle, Gospel and the sermon—and these are really God's words to us.

Christ lives in the Sacraments. In every Sacrament He is truly present. When the priest baptizes, it is really Christ who baptizes. When your bishop confirms it is really Christ who confirms. When the priest raises his hand and absolves you from sin it is really Christ who says: "I absolve you from your sins."

And through the Sacraments of the Holy Church He reigns. In former times many earthly kings led their subjects out to war and death. Christ our King has also declared war—a war against Satan and sin. He has conquered Satan by His death and resurrection. Now He gives His strength to us His subjects, so that we too may conquer Satan and sin. He gives this strength to us through the Sacraments. In Baptism He rescues us from Satan's bondage and makes us children

of God. In Confirmation He gives us strength to live as mature Christians: strength to be loyal to Him when it would be so much easier to follow the devil; in the Holy Eucharist He gives us His Body and Blood as Food; in Confession He heals the wounds of our sins; in the Sacrament of the Sick He gives us consolation and encouragement; through Holy Orders He gives us young men who will be His ambassadors and lead us to Himself. And in Holy Matrimony He fills men and women with supernatural love and gives new members to His Kingdom.

Christ our King lives and reigns in the Church. His presence amongst us should fill us with confidence. As long as we stay close to Him we too shall conquer Satan and sin. Through the sacraments especially we will be strengthened by Christ our King.

St. Paul says: "Christ died for all in order that they who are alive no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and rose again." (2 Cor. 5:15)

Today as we salute Our King on His feast day, let us renew our determination to live for Him alone. And let us remember that He will help us to do this, especially through the Sacraments. Resolve to receive them frequently.