

We gather this afternoon to celebrate the marriage of Iain and Lisa. As we do so we join with them as they celebrate and rejoice in what they have already shared together, in the love and the companionship, the encouragement and the strength they have found in each other

When I was down in Mountmellick, I recall a friend telling me of the various ways people got round to proposing marriage. The one that came to my mind as I looked over the lesson from Ruth that we have just heard is ‘Do you want to be buried with my people?’

Those words from the Book Ruth, as Ruth declared her undying loyalty to the mother-in-law Naomi, speak of the depth of commitment in marriage.

Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.
Ru 1:17 Where you die, I will die--
there will I be buried.

This day is for Ian and Lisa a day of affirmation of all that they have shared together over the years, of even deeper commitment to each other in love.

The opening declaration of the marriage service talks of love in all its dimensions. In the course of this it draws an analogy, based on the teaching of St Paul, comparing the closeness the couple are to have with each other to the closeness that Christ has with his Church. As I often remark that is an almost scary closeness, something that we can at best aspire to. But it is worth reflecting on what is the basis of that closeness that Christ has with his Church - it is nothing less than his sacrificial, self-giving love of himself. The love we have for each other should mirror something of that self-giving love that Christ has for his Church. It is in that context that I would see the words of our Gospel reading this afternoon, that we should love one another just as Christ has loved us. That we should show in our love for one another something of that self

giving, self forgetting love of Christ, as we serve one another, as we defer to one another.

St Paul, in writing to the Church at Corinth teases out the meaning of Christian, Christ like love and how that impacts on human relationships:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (*1 Cor 13:4-7*)

You have already gone through a lot together. You have, I would suspect, discovered strengths in each other that you never realized were there when you first met. In common with all other couples you will have also had to come to terms with disappointments, with hurts and in the process you have discovered that your love for each other, your commitment to each other and your children is a deeper reality than any of these in your life together.

There is a description of marriage that I came across as I prepared for my own marriage that has always appealed to me. I find myself returning to it over and over again:

Marriage is a relationship within which a couple affirm each other's identity, by which they heal and sustain each other and through which they make Christ present to each other.

There is a lovely prayer that forms part of the prayers we will use in a few minutes as we ask God's blessing on Ian and Lisa as they embark on the next stage of their life together.

May their life together witness to your love in this troubled world;
may unity over come division,
forgiveness heal injury,
and joy triumph over sorrow.

Ian and Lisa, we wish you well on this your wedding day. May you be granted many happy years together.