

This afternoon we have come together with Jane and Andrew on a very special day in their lives; the day of your marriage. The day on which you make a life-long commitment of love to one another.

Of course a day like this does not happen out of the blue. You no doubt recall the time you first met, what attracted you to each other. Then attraction grew into love and love into a conviction that you were meant for each other, that you wanted to share the rest of your lives together.

As it turns out, the Gospel reading appointed for tomorrow, from John's Gospel, forms part of the teaching on Christian love Jesus gave to his disciples on the night before he died. As he speaks of his love for them, he calls them to a love for each other, a love that will reflect something of his self giving, self emptying love to the world at large.

This picks up something in the Introduction to the marriage service which speaks of your giving yourselves in love to each other. The service speaks of this commitment, this giving of yourselves to each other in terms of the link between Christ and his Church. If you stop to think about it, this talks not just of the depth of that closeness but maybe more importantly of the nature of that closeness.

The bond between Christ and his Church arises out of nothing less than his total self giving of himself on the Cross. At the heart of your marriage, indeed any marriage, there must be that element of mutual sacrifice, mutual self-giving to each other. The rings you will exchange later on in this service will be daily reminders of your commitment to each other, your pledge of Christ

like love for each other.

Marriage has been described as 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. The love we have for each other should mirror something of that self giving love that Christ has for his Church.

This is drawn out in words from St Paul's 1st letter to the Church at Corinth. that was read as one of our lessons

"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)

It is a love that understands, that works through difficulty, disappointment and even failure. In that love, arising out of our understanding of Christ's love for us and for his Church, problems, anxieties, fears are faced, shared and resolved.

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 Jane and Andrew as they embark on their married life together.

May their life together witness to your love in this troubled world;

may unity overcome division,

forgiveness heal injury,

and joy triumph over sorrow.

Jane and Andrew, we wish you well on this your wedding day. May you be granted long and happy years together. May your marriage be a thing of beauty and true happiness.