

This afternoon here in St Mary's Church Sinead and Ron are celebrating their marriage. For you this the celebration of a life of commitment to one another that has been at the heart of your shared life together. In that shared life you have discovered love and healing in one other. Within that love you have become a family unit. Today, your friends and your family come to share with you in celebrating the love and joy you have found in each other and to ask God's richest blessing upon you in the days that lie ahead. The Bible reading for the service today and the words of the Marriage Service itself are full of themes of commitment, of faithfulness, of the love that you have found for each other.

A day such as this is a day of looking back and looking forward. Your relationship did not happen out of the blue. On this day I invite you to think back to how it all began. The time you first noticed each other, the process in which friendship grew into love and you realised that you wanted to spend the rest of your lives with each other.

As we were reflecting on the other night, the preface that I read at the beginning of the marriage service gives us some insight into the particular Christian dimension of that commitment that you are making to each other today:

'It is God's purpose that, as husband and wife give themselves to each other in love through their lives, they shall be united in that love as Christ is united with his Church.' That bond of love between Christ and his Church finds its ultimate expression in his self giving, self forgetting, self emptying, sacrificial

love. Our love for each other must show something of that same self forgetting love of Christ himself in which the needs of the other are placed above our own. In the context of this ceremony the mutual taking of hands represents your openness and commitment towards one another.

A great deal of thought and preparation has gone into this day. The very decision to have the service here in Church, the shape and structure of the service, the choice of reading, the choice of music - and of course you have thought about what you are going to wear.

Clothes are very personal - they say a lot about how we see ourselves, about how we want other people to see us - they express something of our nature, our personality. A reserved person, for example, is unlikely to appear in bright colours.

St Paul, writing to the Colossians, talks of clothes that suit their new found faith in Christ; and so he talks of our spiritual clothing as he tells us to "clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience ..... forgiving each other just as the Lord forgave you." Then he says, "Clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony ...."  
*(Col 3)*

This links in with the passage that we read from Paul's letter to the Romans

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup> love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. .... <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another; ..... <sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

*(Romans 12:9-18)*

Your choice of the clothes you have chosen to wear on this your wedding day will have reflected something of who you are, who you are as a couple and the marriage bond you have entered into today. May the love you have for each other continue to grow; may it reflect something of that Christ centred love that Paul was talking about. May that love enfold you in the days and weeks and months and years to come as together you continue to share each others' joys, understand each others' shortcomings, forgive each others' failings, sustain each other in all that lies ahead for you both. May you both find in your marriage and in each other true peace and happiness in your life together before God.