

**Homily for the Mass for Couples Married Fifty Years or More
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Springfield, IL**

Mass for the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A) | September 24th, 2023 AD

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers and Deacons, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: It is good to be with you to celebrate this Mass for Couples Married Fifty Years or More. Your fidelity to one another for more than half of a century is a powerful witness to the entire Church of the beauty of the vocation of matrimony and is a symbol of the love that Christ has for His Church.

Conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27a).

This exhortation from the concluding words of today's second reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians provides a key for us to understand how these couples have succeeded in living a married life for fifty years or more. For younger married couples seeking guidance on how to succeed in remaining committed to each other for fifty years or more, like the couples who are celebrating here today, I urge you to follow this sage advice from Saint Paul: *Conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.*

What does it mean to conduct yourself in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ? I would suggest that the best way to do so would be to follow the

theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, which are supernatural capacities to receive three divine powers from Our Lord's fullness of grace. These virtues are called theological, or divine, because they unite us to God. Virtues are good habits that order our daily lives to God, allowing us to participate in God's own Trinitarian, divine life.

"Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that He has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because He is truth itself" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1814).

"Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1817).

"Charity [or love] is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1822).

As an example of how to do this, I would like to highlight the grace-filled life of a couple married 75 years ago on September 11th, 1948. This couple that I hold up as a model of married life were my parents, John H. Paprocki, Jr., and Veronica Mary Bonat.

My father was a man of faith. He sought to follow the vocation that God had in mind for him, thinking initially that he was being called to the priesthood. After five years in the minor seminary at Quigley Preparatory Seminary in Chicago and one year in the major seminary at Saint Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois, he discerned that he was not called to the priesthood. Instead, he met my mother, they married and had nine children, of which I am the third. Dad also practiced his faith devoutly and made sure that he passed that faith along to his children by what we were taught at home, by going to church, and by attending Catholic schools.

My father was a man of hope. I am sure there were times he wondered how he would be able to provide for nine children, but placing his trust in God, we always had what we needed in terms of a good home, sufficient clothing, Catholic education, and plenty of food for all of us.

My father was a man of love. Saint Thomas Aquinas says that the virtue of love is willing the good of the other. Dad always wanted what would be good for Mom and us children. Of course, the greatest good is to go to heaven when we die. Good spouses help each other get to heaven and they help show the way for their children to get to heaven. That is what Dad and Mom did for us.

My mother was also a woman of faith. Her parents were Catholic and had Mom's older brother and sister baptized, but they never had their two younger children baptized. So, when my mother was only thirteen years old and her younger brother was only nine, they went on their own initiative to the church to ask to be baptized. My mother is a wonderful example of being an intentional Catholic. She did not just happen to be raised Catholic as a matter of social or cultural expectation, but sought to become Christian of her own volition. With my Dad, she passed on that faith to her children as well.

My mother was a woman of hope. The virtue of hope is not naïve optimism or acting like a Pollyanna who pretends that all is sweetness and light. I am sure there were times when Mom was exasperated with raising nine children, but she always trusted in God that all would turn out well in the end.

Mom was a woman of love. I never saw my parents fight or have a disagreement. In fact, they seemed to go out of their way to defer to each other's wishes. They truly wanted what was best for each other and for their family.

Dad died on December 13, 1997. Mom passed away on March 13, 2019. It is my firm hope that they are now sharing in the happiness, joy, and love of God's Kingdom forever.

So, with Saint Paul, I urge you: *Conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.* Live a life of faith, hope, and love, and God will reward you.

May God give us this grace. Amen.