

“A Homily for JoAnne and Jill’s Wedding” by Marjory Bankson

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Homily for JoAnne Natale and Jill Joseph’s wedding

What does one say to a couple who’s been together for 25 years? You already know the pleasures and pitfalls of your relationship. You know where the sand-traps are, and what to avoid if possible. You already know how hard it is to be forever patient and kind; how hard it is not to insist on your own way.

When you chose Paul’s letter to the Corinthians as the text for today, I knew how important this marriage ceremony was for the two of you and it gives me great pleasure to offer the blessing of both church and state to your commitment today. So from the vantage point of our long marriage, let me offer three observations.

First, marriage is a calling. It is a desire that God has planted in each of you, and we are gathered here today to witness your “Yes” to that call and offer our support where we can. Although our culture touts marriage for companionship and karmic completion, I believe God intends it to be a spiritual

path that stretch you in many unknown ways.

You will be learning how to love the “otherness” of each other until you draw your last breath.

Learning to love our differences only happens in a committed relationship, where you have pledged no escape. In most other circumstances, you can either quit or go quiet.

But if marriage is a spiritual calling, as rigorous and as rewarding as any other call, then you will each hold the other’s life-force as a treasure to be protected and nourished like a newborn. We have already seen that both of you are capable of that commitment and dedication in your work. Now you are promising to tend your relationship with the same kind of care and tenderness.

Second, marriage is like a third entity, beyond your separate selves. Love is the language of that country, which exists out beyond right or wrong. When you are tempted to strike back or keep score because one of you is giving more than the other, love will draw you toward something greater, something only dimly perceived.

You must make time for tending your marriage. I’ve noticed that simple tasks, like washing the car or weeding the garden, cooking dinner or eating breakfast together, build a home for your hearts to grow. Given your busy and demanding work, it will be tempting to see vacations as a time to tend your relationship, but that will not be enough. As Paul says in the

reading that you chose, faith and hope will pass away. Wishing won't make a marriage thrive. Believing won't make things better. In the end, love leads to wholeness because it makes room for all parts of you to be included.

Third, marriage needs a community for continued growth. That is the reason why this particular grouping of people have gathered here today – because we want your marriage to succeed. We are standing with you and for you, so that when you feel alone or abandoned, your marriage is not your only sanctuary. No marriage is strong enough to hold all of your individual needs.

There was a time when we took community for granted because people didn't move around. Extended family gave people space and time to adjust, forgive, regroup. But now that we live in such a transient world, we need new skills to find a chosen family that will offer you companionship and occasionally critique when you are tempted to hold a grudge or keep score. Look around. Everyone in this room is here because we want your marriage to flourish. Ask for help when you need it. Seek support wherever you are and let love be your guide whenever you come to a new place.

I'd like to close with the pledge of loyalty and faithfulness used in thousands of weddings over the years. We chose it for ours, fifty years ago, hardly noticing that it was made by one woman to another. Ruth said to Naomi:

Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge.

Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.

May it be ever so for the two of you.

Amen.