

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Sunday February 8, 2026)

Some of us are going to get a little exercise today.

If you're engaged, or you've been married for five years or less, please stand and turn around for a moment. Everyone, take a look.

Congratulations, folks! Please sit.

Now I want **all the married couples to stand — even if your spouse isn't here with you today.**

If you've been married:

- 15 years or less, please sit.
- 25 years or less, please sit.
- 40 years or less, please sit.
- 50 years or less, please sit.
- 55 years or less, please sit.

If there's anyone still standing — how many years have you been married?

To those who are engaged or newly married, please stand again and turn around.

Look carefully at these couples who have been married for many years. Recognize their faces.

After Mass, come by Coffee Sunday in the parish hall:

- Introduce yourselves. Have a coffee.
- Ask one or two of our seasoned veterans for a piece of advice – that goes for everyone – sorry married veterans to put you on the spot!

What this simple exercise reminds all of us — married or not — is that there is a tremendous amount of wisdom right here in this church. And it doesn't all come from up here (perhaps, not that much of it comes from up here on this subject).

We celebrate Marriage Sunday to highlight the beauty and dignity of marriage, and to honour the witness of those who say *yes* to this vocation — not just once, long ago, but every single day.

Being married for any length of time today is a sign of hope.

And the witness of marriage matters to all of us, because marriage is not just personal. Strong, faithful marriages have built up the Church — *and they still do.*

2

Marriage as we know is a Sacrament — a visible sign of Christ’s faithful, enduring love. And since Jesus Himself wasn’t married, marriage must point beyond the couple to something greater. Just as Holy Orders is not about the priest alone, marriage is not simply about feelings or attraction.

If marriage were only about love as a feeling, it wouldn’t last.

When we say marriage is a covenant, a sacred bond, we mean it is rooted in *fidelity* — not convenience.

What makes long marriages so powerful is not that they were easy.

I doubt any of our long-married couples would say their marriages were always easy. They **endured** — that’s why it’s a powerful witness.

Most couples had no idea what they were truly signing up for.

They **persevered** through disappointment, hurt, misunderstanding, illness, loss, anger, and heartbreak.

Most have probably “lost that loving feeling” once or twice.

What makes long-lasting marriages stand out is that they did not give up — and if they are here, part of that is trusting that God is with them in the good and bad times.

The same is true of faith.

We don’t abandon God because prayer is hard or answers come slowly. Faith deepens when it’s tested.

Newlyweds and those preparing for marriage — your love *will* be tested. Don’t fear that. Don’t see it as failure.

That is how real love and real faith grow.

The Gospel today is one I often preach at weddings: “*You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.*”

Christian marriage is meant to preserve what is good, to give flavour to a cynical world, and to be a shining light of hope. A marriage that perseveres becomes light for others.

And that is why marriage deserves better than we have often given it — and I mean us, the Church.

3

In priestly formation, we invest years in mentoring, accompaniment, and support and fewer than 8% of priests leave the priesthood. Meanwhile, more than a third of Catholics have experienced divorce.

Priests aren't better people somehow – I think we all know that. We simply have not prepared or supported married couples in the same way — and very few expect us to anymore.

Here at St. Bernadette's, we are committed to raising that bar.

- We take preparation seriously and have many committed to marriage formation.
- We walk with couples — and we're continuing to work at pastoral accompaniment and marriage preparation and accompaniment.

But we must also speak honestly about another reality: marriage sometimes breaks down. And when it does, the Church – and I mean all of us – must *never* abandon people.

Too many faithful Catholics were pushed away because their struggles were met with judgment instead of accompaniment.

I know people who were told to return to abusive situations because “marriage is for life.” They left the Church.

That's not the Gospel.

We don't undermine Church teaching by helping people.

But we *do* undermine the Gospel when we apply laws without compassion or refuse to engage the real suffering people carry in their lives.

So I ask us: what are we doing to support marriages before they break down, in the early years? And are we brave enough to share our own stories, even our struggles and failures — not as experts, but as fellow disciples?

There is no perfect marriage.

And if your marriage ended painfully, your story still has much value. What you have learned may save someone else years of heartache.

Marriage is a gift from God. It's the bedrock of the Church. And every one of us has light to offer others.

So, my friends, whatever our situation — married, divorced, it's complicated— we must journey this life together.

We must be that salt, that light for each other.

And as we celebrate Marriage Sunday, may our married couples continue to show us what Christian love, fidelity, and hope truly look like – something that helps us grow in relationship with God and with each other.

Fr. Chris' Homilies