THE THREE GIFTS OF THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

Bp. Michał Stobnicki

Today we celebrate the Second Sunday after Epiphany, and on this Sunday the observance of the liturgical mystery of the Epiphany of the Lord is, as it were, brought to a close. Today we become witnesses of the first miracle of the Lord Jesus, when at the wedding in Cana of Galilee He changes water into wine and thus shows His divine power to the whole world, reveals Himself as the Lord of all creation.

My dear brethren, as we all remember, so recently, on 6 January, on the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, we commemorated the three kings who came to pay homage to the Word made flesh, the divine Child. And they offered Him a threefold gift: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Saint Augustine, writing about the sacrament of marriage, pointed out that God in turn bestows three gifts on spouses: *fides*, *sacramentum et proles*. Allow me today, when in the Gospel we hear the account of the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee, to say a few words about marriage. About marriage, in which many of you persevere; about marriage, of which some of you are seriously thinking, and surely there are also those who are not yet thinking about it, though perhaps they already should be. So it is good that at least once a year a sermon be devoted precisely to the sacrament of marriage.

FIDELITY LIKE GOLD

Dear faithful, the first of the graces bound up with the sacramental marriage bond is fidelity. Fidelity, which we could compare to gold. Or rather, perhaps, we should say that marital fidelity is a treasure more precious than all the gold of the world. For the mutual devotion and trust of the spouses is the key to the peace and stability of the family, it is the source of happiness. And where the radiance of fidelity is lacking, suspicion, distrust, aversion and unhappiness appear, which can lead the spouses to great evil.

And note that in Holy Scripture, when we read the account of the building of the temple in Jerusalem by King Solomon, we find the information that all the metal parts, to be protected from rust, were overlaid with gold. And it is the same with the gold of fidelity. On the day when the spouses vow fidelity to one another, marital faithfulness until death, on that very day God, as it were, covers their union with gold. Gold which they are bound to keep, which they are bound to guard, for this gold of fidelity prevents the corruption of the marriage. This gold of fidelity should be guarded like a great treasure. A great treasure.

THE INCENSE OF SANCTIFICATION

Next, dear faithful, the second grace, the second gift that God offers to spouses, is the gift of sanctification, the participation of the spouses and of the family they have founded in the life of the Most Holy Trinity itself. This gift of sanctification we could compare to the gift of incense, for the spouses are called, like incense on glowing coals, to be consumed out of love for God and for one another.

The great misfortune of today's young people is that when they think about marriage, they forget that marriage, which is meant to serve sanctification, is inseparably bound up with the cross. If someone enters into marriage expecting it to be one great, unending honeymoon, he will experience a painful disappointment. Marriage, my dear brethren, since it is meant to serve the sanctification of the spouses and of the family they have founded, must be inseparably bound up with the cross, with difficulties, with trials, with testing. But in all these trials, crosses and hard experiences the spouses are not alone. Through the sacrament of marriage they receive a grace that helps them to bear this cross of married life, to bear it together, for that is what the spouses undertake to do.

And they ought constantly to remind themselves of

the oath they took on their wedding day. In taking the marriage oath, they called upon God, Three in One, and all the saints to help them in carrying it out. And Catholic spouses must never forget this. They are bound constantly to seek this divine support, to live in sanctifying grace. For where God's grace is lacking, there, my dear brethren, the devil will appear in a moment. The devil, who will do everything possible to break up such a marriage. A marriage in which there is nothing supernatural, in which the flame of true love therefore goes out, becomes a marriage living on mutual grievances, spiteful remarks and resentments.

MYRRH AND TRANSMITTING LIFE

And finally the third grace, the third gift that God gives to spouses, is the vocation to transmit life. And to this gift corresponds myrrh, the resin the ancients obtained from trees and shrubs and used at funerals in order to prevent, to halt, the decay of the dead body. And although perhaps we have never thought about it, the joy of parents and grandparents on the wedding day also comes from their hope of seeing in the faces of grandchildren and great-grandchildren the image of those who have departed, and who through this relay of generations are, as it were, preserved from decay, from oblivion.

As the Catholic Church teaches, the fundamental end of the marriage union is the begetting of offspring. On their wedding day the spouses take upon their shoulders an even greater responsibility, for they undertake to bring up in the Catholic faith the offspring with which God will bless them. And so the task of spouses is not only to populate this earth, but above all to populate the Kingdom of Heaven. Catholic parents are bound to raise their daughters and sons as Catholics, and in this way to gain great merits and to be able to rejoice in their own salvation and that of their descendants.

PRAYER FOR SPOUSES

Dear faithful, on this Second Sunday after Epiphany we need to give thanks from the depths of our hearts for the institution of the sacrament of marriage, for the fact that the Lord Jesus decided to raise this natural union of man and woman to the dignity of a sacrament, through which God's grace is given to the spouses and to the family they have founded. And we need, my dear brethren, to pray today in a special way not only for Catholic spouses who already persevere in the sacramental marriage bond. We need not only to ask that they never forget that marriage serves sanctification, and so must involve sacrifices, must involve crosses, trials, tests, perhaps even tears. But we need, my dear brethren, to pray also for the whole multitude, the growing multitude of young people who have no thought of entering into marriage, who live like the godless, fearing neither God nor men, who, my dear brethren, make light of the salvation of their own souls. For if they persist in sin, if they live in sin, they draw God's punishment upon themselves, my dear brethren. If they do not come to their senses in time, if they die in that sin, in the sin of impurity, they will go to eternal damnation.

We need also to pray for the growing number, the growing circle of young married couples who despise the vocation to transmit life. We see, my dear brethren, around us more and more young couples who have no children and do not want any, who despise the vocation to parenthood. A child, my dear brethren, is replaced today in more and more homes by a little dog and a kitty. What a demonic perversion, what a demonic turning of God's order upside down.

Dear faithful, we must realise that this clash of good and evil in our times is played out to a large extent on the field of the family. The devil does everything possible to destroy the normal family, to destroy the normal family living in accordance with God's order, with God's will, so that it disappears from the face of the earth, so that normal marriage is replaced by a parody of it with partner number 1 and partner number 2, so that normal parenthood is replaced by a parody with parent number 1 and parent number 2.

We must, my dear brethren, stand today in defence of Catholic marriage, for without Catholic marriage, without healthy Catholic marriage, there will be no Catholic children, there will be no Catholic families, there will be no Catholic vocations. The future of the Church, the future of our nations depends, my dear brethren, on what our families will look like, on what

the marriages contracted today will look like. Will the spouses want to make use of these gifts with which God desires to endow them? *Fides*, *sacramentum et proles*, as Saint Augustine wrote: fidelity, sanctification, the transmission of life. If we reject these gifts of God, then there is no future before us. And may the Catholics of today, my dear brethren, come to their senses and return to the way of God, before it is too late.

Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.