

Marriage - A Fountain of Grace

As we enter into February and soon Lent (Ash Wednesday 22nd February) we also celebrate two feasts, the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple by Mary and Joseph known as Candlemass and the now 'paganised feast' of St. Valentine. You may wonder what these two have in common but in some ways both remind us of the duality of action. Joseph and Mary took the Child Jesus to the temple. St. Valentine (and yes, he did exist) Priest, Physician and Martyr (died 269) served the needs of couples and families about to be martyred in the great persecutions of the Emperors of Rome. Indeed we have only to look at the Martyrs of Korea many centuries (19th) later to realise how many married people and children gave their lives for the truth of the Gospel. Even today in parts of the world families are killed or persecuted simply for being Christian.

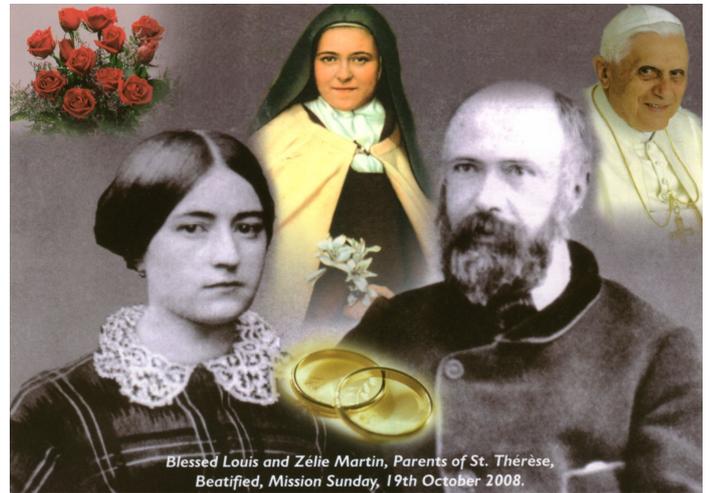
Today when marriage is so often seen as a social contract, or further debased or trivialised, or redefined in terms that are not Christian, and when the concentration seems to be on the Wedding itself, as if all else will follow, it is essential that we remember that marriage is a Sacrament of great grace, a means of holiness, a permanent estate, a joint journey of Man and Woman to God. It is a place of nurture for

children and a place of fulfilment for all.

Does this mean that it is always a 'bed of roses'?

No call or vocation is without a degree of troubles and

crosses but it is graced. There are in fact many saintly married men and women of our time. The Church itself is trying to give us more exemplars to follow: people of differing life styles, countries and backgrounds, rich and poor alike. There are many saintly men and women who were married. Some carried out their apostolic activities once widowed such as St. Jane Frances Chantal founder of the



*Blessed Louis and Zélie Martin, Parents of St. Thérèse
Beatified, Mission Sunday, 19th October 2008.*

Visitation Sisters or St. Louise De Marrillac linked with St. Vincent de Paul, not to mention Bl. Frederic Ozanam founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and of course St. Elisabeth Ann Seton. But today we have couples who are being given to us as examples who lived in our times and in some cases both were beatified, or one leapfrogging the other as the church deliberates. We have Louis and Zélie Martin parents of St. Therese both now declared Blessed. Similarly, we have the Quattrocchis (Luigi and Maria), St. Gianna Molla, a doctor, wife and mother, whose husband living until his nineties testified to her holiness and himself is being considered for honour. There is The Servant of God, Catherine Doherty (1985) and her husband Eddie founders of the Madonna House Community, St. Cerafino Malla, a Gypsy saint and martyr (known as El Pelé), Blessed ToRot (died 1945) a martyr for



Blessed Luigi Beltrame Quattrocchi (1889-1951) and Blessed Maria Corsini Beltrame Quattrocchi (1884-1965)

marriage, Franz Jagerstatter who opposed Hitler and last but not least father of nine Blessed Marino Blanes Giner (died 1936). All were married, many for years, and testify to the holiness of marriage which enabled them to respond to their individual calls or joint calls.

About Blessed Peter ToRot, Blessed John Paul II said "His beatification is a fresh inspiration to married couples throughout the world strengthening their resolve to trust that God will reward their fidelity to Him" (1995).

Indeed, the list of married saintly people grows. Yet we are blind to this way of sanctified life. As truly as there are other vows in religious life the couple make promises and commitments to each other before God and the assembly. This seals a special bond between them until death. Now, we live in an age where endurance, living for others and self giving are seen as not essential. We all know of couples who have stuck together through thick and thin and are still happy in spite of many trials and tribulations, ups and downs.

The grace of marriage is endless and available. There is no doubt that some difficulties are intensely painful and require great courage. It is also true that this requires the cooperation of both spouses and sadly where one does not cooperate with grace or indeed is opposed to it or to marriage itself, then the marriage cannot prosper and be fruitful. We must always pray for couples in this situation with difficult

relationships or abusive ones.

But do we truly pray for Marriages? Do we as married people pray for our spouses and pray together with them?

Was not Our Lady told that a great sadness or sorrow would pierce her heart? Did she not become widowed and a mother without a son?



St. Gianna Molla with Pietro Molla

Marriage will never be easy, but it can bring great joy and satisfaction and truly be a means of growing saintly.

Children too can bring much happiness as well as challenge. Do we support each

other and encourage those who are burdened and weary?

Perhaps during Lent we could offer the Lord some small gift or self denial for a family we know who is troubled. Families today are fractured. Perhaps we could decide to pray together as a couple, or family. Perhaps we could read of those who are good models for us that will encourage us. Perhaps we could opt for Holiness!



The Molla Family

A little reflection...

A husband is given news of his terminal illness. Husband and wife are distressed. Then grace flows and he says to his wife.... "Posie, this is the first day of the rest of our

lives, and from now on we have to really live each day as if it is our last together. What ever the future holds, the



The Quattrocchis

present is here for us, and we will love and forgive each day, like we never have before. I know that grace is there for whatever we have to go through. Let us not waste time on regrets from the past or fears of the future, but live in the present moment." (Marriage a Fountain of Grace, Rosalie McPhee2001)



Catherine and Eddie Doherty