



## Homily of Archbishop Leo Cushley of St Andrews & Edinburgh

### Holy Mass with a Blessing of Engaged & Married Couples

St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh, Wednesday, 18 May

My dear friends,

A warm welcome to all you from near and far who have joined us to celebrate the anniversary of your marriage, or in the case of a few younger folk, just the fact that you're married or recently tied the knot.

We give thanks for the blessings you have already received, for the grace to love and to persevere, and for the many gifts given you, including, for many of you here, the gift of children. I'm also grateful to Fr Jeremy Milne of the Commission for Family & Life and his team, for setting up our celebration this evening.

When we listen to the Book of Genesis as we have done again this evening, we are taken, as it were, to a time of essentials: that in this universe we are here and alive, almost miraculously; that we come from somewhere, that we are going somewhere; and that none of this is by our doing.

Some philosophers manage to turn this into a complaint, that they never asked to be born! But Christians see this as the greatest gift of all, the gift of life. Everything is gift; our existence, and life itself is something we have received from someone else, and for believers we see, ultimately, that all of life and existence comes from God himself and his goodness.

As it says in Genesis, we see God's creation, and we see that, indeed, it is very good.

But, as I nearly said at the top of my remarks, we can't help wondering about where we come from. Genesis looks at the big-picture answer to that, but it also looks at the closer, more immediate answer, which is, that we all of us have a mother and father.

Much of the deep appeal of the documentaries like, "Who do think you are?" and ones that help adopted people go exploring for their birth parents, is that we are all fascinated by *where we're from*. In most cases, by simple biology, we know who our mothers are, but in today's western world, a very high number of people don't know who their father is, or he is known but absent from their lives.

Human beings as they evolved – unlike other primates – needed a lot more parenting in their infancy, and that meant bonding between male and female adults was an essential for human survival, and that bonding and partnership became deep rooted in us.

This gave rise to marriage as a cultural institution to bind the *father* to mother and child, and to give the child a clear sense of kin, of where he or she is from. Marriage thus became a vehicle that created societies and civilisations, as everyone got to know *where they were from* – who their mother was – but in particular, who their father was.

And so, it's been said that while *motherhood* is a biological fact, *fatherhood* is a cultural achievement.

In the light of that, and of the passage from Genesis, it's interesting to return to Our Lord's very familiar words in the gospel tonight, where he says, "From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. This is why a man must leave father and mother, and the two become one body."

We often think of this as being connected to the complementarity between the sexes, and to having children. And yet, it is more likely to mean that, when a man and a woman marry and become one flesh,

they become one as *kin*. They and their families they come from, are united in the project. They become each other's kin. Young people, coming to me to ask to be married, when they look at their in-laws, I've often heard them say, "Well, I'm not marrying *them*" - but in fact that is exactly what is happening in marriage. In marriage we really do become one flesh, we become kin with one another. Mother-in-law means she's your *mother*. Sister-in-law means she's your sister.

Relations of kin are established, our culture is deepened, society is strengthened, and all because two people love each other and want to set up home together.

This is also why the Lord adds, and "What God has joined together, no man must divide". This sounds sometimes like a legal straitjacket, but it's actually a kind -and solemn - word of advice, the wisdom of our civilisation and of the ages.

Much of this, my friends, may sound a little dry and academic and far from the hurly burly of your daily relationships and family life. In our western world today, marriage starts with people falling in love and not by considering the anthropological consequences of their actions.

But it's only right that we take a moment to see the importance, and even the beauty, of the intersection of so many different threads of who we are in marriage.

The significance of marriage, of its bond, of its links of kinship, of the consequences of the solemn pledge of fidelity between future parents, has been replaced by something that's easy to obtain and light on commitment.

The civil institution described as marriage today is almost empty of the significance I've just described here, or what I've offered here is dismissed as old fashioned or an impossible ideal. But it is something that has held society together as kin for millennia, and I believe we jettison it at our peril.

Until now it has told us where we come from, in a small way and a big way, and has helped us to know that we are loved unconditionally, that we are respected, that we are safe, that we can rely completely on each other, that we know where we come from.

Let me congratulate all of you on the happy occasion of your various anniversaries, great and small, and ask you to pray with me for those contemplating marriage, and for those who misrepresent it and misunderstand it.

May we learn again as a society to value marriage, and to promote it to the greater good of everyone.

Amen.