

Talk 2: God's Love Story with Us

Introduction

The mariner of Brittany prays to God as he puts to sea: *“Lord, your sea is so great and my boat is so small”*. Although we feel so small and insignificant in the great scheme of things, God holds us in little boat in his hand. This is the belief of Divine Providence.

Knowing what God wants for you and releasing his will is the essence of the Christian life. It is the essence of what it means to be holy. We say to God; Father, I want what you want. God's will and my will become one.

I remember a great Schoenstatt Father, Esteban Uriburu, who once said in a meeting of priests, when we discussed Divine Providence. He said: *“God's will no matter what! God's will even if it kills me!”*

Doing what God wants and not what I want will not kill us. On the contrary. It will give us a new and vibrant life. It will give us the strength and the courage to follow him step by step who is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6)

Divine Providence means that we set ourselves the goal of united our faith to our real lives. We set ourselves the goal of making a covenant between faith and life and between Jesus Christ and our daily living. This is an adventure.

Co-Workers with the Lord

There is a big difference between believing in God's Providence, and not only believing it but want to actively discover what God wants and doing it. This is why Father Kentenich spoke of a “practical” faith. He didn't mean a theoretical faith, or even a doctrinal faith. Most Catholics believe in Divine Providence – they have no problems with that. However, few Catholics actively want to co-workers with God in realising his will step by step. Father Kentenich called people who desire this: People who make history.

If you look at history there are three types of approaches:

God will do it all;

we will do it all

and God and me, we can do it together. These are the people who make history.

People who say: “**God will do it all**” are saying that you just have to trust God, he will sort everything out. He will provide etc. They think that God has decided everything already and we have just got to bow our heads and accept it. They forget that God wants us to work with him. He doesn't want to work in this world on his own. He looks for allies to realise his Plan of love.

Those who say: “**We will do it all**”, are the ones who have the opposite approach. They believe that their efforts, skills, talents are all that is needed. Everything depends on them. They only trust in their own know-how and possibilities. They don't accept a real dialogue with God.

Both these approaches in their own way have not understood the great challenge of Providence. They will tire and become disillusioned.

Divine Providence includes the action of God and the action of each one of us. It means trusting God totally, but also be willing to commit ourselves to his Plan.

St Ignatius of Loyola summed it up: *“Trust in God as if everything depended on him. Do your best as if everything depended on you!”*

Between the two extremes, you find the only true Christian approach and that is the man or woman, like Christ, who believes and feels that he or she is a co-worker of God in making history. This is the reality of “Covenant”.

Although this approach is easy to describe it is much harder to live every day.

Can you image what faith and Church and religion would be like, if the majority of Catholic were people who actively collaborated with the Plan of God for the world and for their personal lives?

People who make history are the ones who know that they are co-workers of God in history. They are dependent on God but feel called to do their bit to realise his Divine Plan of wisdom and love. They make this Plan to the Road-Map for their personal lives. They try and discover the will of God in what is happening in the world, and what is happening in their own lives.

Remember the Last Talk

There were some great questions last week. Veronica asked the question about Jesus and the Church. Can you “know, love and serve” Jesus and leave the Church aside?

Some people want to believe but they don't want to belong. They desire Christ but not a church. At our very core is the belief that Christ and His Church are one; it is a package deal.

Think about it, in the days after His death and resurrection, Jesus' followers easily could have split up and followed Christ on their own, but instead they realized that they were united to Him through each other. The Church, beginning in those very first days when Jesus told Peter that he would be the rock upon whom he'd build His Church, is Christ alive!

How do we know Christ, if the Church doesn't introduce us to him? How can we ignore the family for whome Jesus died on the cross on Calvary. How can we do without his “gift of self” in the Sacraments?

Get rid of the Baggage

If we are serious about Divine Providence then we have to give God our time. There is no other way. It is not going to work otherwise. One of the most difficult ways to give God our time is when we ask him to forgive. Yes, folks, I can already hear the groaning – it's time to talk about confession again – by popular demand.

God is love and an expression of his love is mercy. Mercy means giving something good when you don't deserve it. Father Kentenich often spoken

of “swimming” in God’s vast ocean of mercy. His mercy is endless. God has given his mercy as a gift from the very beginning.

Let’s look at sin before we look at mercy. Some people say: “Do I need mercy?” Hold on a minute, I am a good person! I really don’t have any sins... etc”.

Let’s look at Genesis 3, the Fall of Adam and Eve. This is the story of the original sin. We know the story, God, Adam, Eve. Eve meets Satan in the garden. He isn’t a horrible figure with horns and a long tail, he is Lucifer, the Light bearer who stands in the presence of the Lord. “Hay, Eve! – Hay, Satan!” he tempts her. How does he do it? He instils doubt in her mind. This is what we always does. This is how he starts with you and me.

God had said to Eve and Adam that they should not touch of the Tree in the garden. The Tree wasn’t bad, it wasn’t poisonous. There was nothing wrong with the Tree. God just said “no”! It is as simple as that. He said if you eat of this fruit, you will die. God is not a liar! He meant it. You will die when you eat this fruit. The devil instils doubt. He says to Eve: “ Come, on, you will not die. You’ve got this all wrong – you will become like God”.

How did Jesus call the devil? He called him the “father of lies”. This is a huge porky. Eve will die – her soul will die, because death is the consequence of sin.

Isn’t this the big sin today? Isn’t the original sin the biggest sin that we all commit even now in the third millennium? We want to make our own decisions. We want to say what is right and wrong. We don’t want anyone telling us – not even God. If you think it’s right, then it is right. If you think its wrong, then it is wrong. You decide.

Think of the actor Tom Cruise. He wanted to be a Franciscan priest. But he left the Church to join Scientology and when he was asked why he commented: “If you are a Catholic you have to live by someone else’s rules, in scientology you make your own rules.”

Sin always begins in our lives with doubt: is not going to Mass on a Sunday really a sin? Nah. Is it really a sin not to go to Church on Holy Days of

Obligation? Nah. Is sex before marriage really as sin? Is stealing from your employer really a sin? Is gossiping really a sin? And so on!

The devil instils doubt. Eve sees the Tree, she sees how beautiful the fruit is. She sees that is desirable. She wants it. Remember there is always something pleasurable about sin – otherwise what would be the point? This attracting to sin is call concupiscence – it refers to the pleasure and the attraction of sin. There is something in us, a tendency, to sin, because it gives us pleasure.

Sin is ultimately saying a big “no” to God. It is hurting God and slowly destroying a relationship.

What does sin do to us?

What are the effects of sin in our lives? I will name four here.

1. We will die. Our soul dies, our ability to be close to God dies.

2. We become slaves to sin. Try to stop doing something we have done for a while, if you think it is no big deal.

3. Sin separates us from the Father. You can commit 100 Million mortal sins, but it will never stop God loving you. Nothing can stop God loving you. We can run from that love. We can put up a wall of ice, a barrier, between us and the Lord. God hasn't changed, God will not change – we have to change. We separate ourselves from him.

Jesus died for our sins

Remember there is nothing you and I can do to earn heaven. Look at Jesus on the cross, if we could be good enough to earn heaven, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was a waste of time. We are saved by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We don't merit it and we never will. God saved us by faith and by good works that prove the sincerity of that faith. We are saved by grace.

Remember he story of the man who goes to heaven and God has lost the Book of Life where all his good deeds are recorded. Will he get into

heaven. Yes, but only through the grace and endless mercy and love of God.

We come to stand before God. Why should you get into heaven? St Peter is sitting there at a big desk and has a very loud buzzer for every wrong answer. Why should you get into heaven? You might answer:

- I went to Mass every Sunday (buzz)
- I listen to Father Duncan's endless Talks (buzz)
- I followed all the commandments (buzz)
- Mother Teresa says: I was a living saint (buzz)
- Pope John Paul goes and says: "well, I was the Pope". (buzz)

There is only one correct answer: Because Jesus your Son died for my and for my sins. He paid the price. And when we give this answer, God then says to us: "Prove it!"

We prove that we mean this by the way we live. We are not saved so much by what we do, we are saved by what he does. We live the way he commanded us to live. And when this doesn't happen we go to confession.

Where does it say in the Bible that we should go to Confession?

Does it say in the Bible that we should go to confession? Two examples:

John 20:22-23

And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Notice Jesus says whosever sins YOU forgive, they are forgive. God gave the power to forgive sins in his name to the priest. He absolves in the person of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 16:18

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the

kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”.

Peter is given the keys of the kingdom with authority to bind and loose. Why did Jesus do this? I don't know, but he did.

What happens when we go to confession? The first thing that confession does is to take away our pride. Pride dies. Sin isn't just breaking a rule. “Come on, I'm not hurting anyone...” It is about hurting someone who loves us. It is about a relationship and not about rules and regulations.

I broke a commandment, I make it right. Is that all confession is? No, we break a relationship through sin and we need to make that relationship right.

Pride – the centre of sin is “I, me, my”. I did it “My Way”.

A protestant minister once commented: “The problem with you Catholics is that you are always in confession, but you never repent!”

Repent means that I will not do it anymore. Let Jesus live his life inside of you – but will you let him? Repent means the firm and sincere resolve to stop sinning.

Think of it this way. I meet a friend of mine. Break his nose, then say “I'm really sorry”. “Ok I forgive you”, he answers. An hour later, I see him again, I break his arm and one leg. I say again: “I'm really sorry”. “Ok I forgive you”, he answers. An hour later, I find him again, this time I break both arms, both legs and jump on his head. Then I say again “I'm really sorry”. “he will now say: “I don't think I believe you. Because if you are really sorry, you would stop doing it.

The intention is at confession: I will never do this ever again. I am going to stop doing this. Repentance means that I am done with this sin.

How do you make a good confession?

1. Go at least once a month. Pray to the Holy Spirit to reveal to me my sinfulness. When people look at me, do they see Jesus or do they see me.

2. Get a good examination of conscience.

A word on different kinds of sin. A mortal sin has three elements to it:

1. it must be a serious matter – It's wrong
2. You must have full knowledge – You know it's wrong
3. Full consent. You do it anyway.

When all these are present, then you have a mortal sin on your soul. If you die with a mortal sin you go to hell. You do not pass Go and you do not collect £200. and you just need one.

Think of a guy climbing to the top of Blackpool Tower. He jumps off. He falls and hits the ground – splat – he is dead. He just did it once. That was all that was needed. It is the same with a mortal sin.

One mortal sin is enough to kill your soul.

Every sin you confess – Jesus dies for your sin. Every sin you don't confess – you die for it. Confession is the opportunity to get rid of it forever.

Best Example of practical faith - Abraham, Father of Divine Providence

One of the most powerful examples and inspiration for Divine Providence in the history of salvation, is the encounter between God and Abraham. Abraham is called the "man of faith" -- or in the first Eucharistic prayer -- we refer to him as "our father of faith". He is probably the best and the most unique model of practical faith in Divine Providence in the old Testament. Without doubt, Divine Providence was simply his "daily bread".

First of all, some background information about Abraham. Jews, Christians and Muslims claim Abraham as their father: the first and the last group in a physical sense and the Christians in a spiritual sense. As Christians we identify strongly with the Jews in our claim.

Let us look now at the life and experiences of Abraham and how he gave an answer to the initiatives of God in a heroic way. We will be referring here to the first book of the Bible, Genesis, chapter 12 up to the 32nd chapter. The Apostle Paul calls him “the father of all who believe” (Rom. 4: 11). The history of Abraham’s life of faith spans one whole century. We read in Ch. 12: 4 that he was seventy-five years old when he left Haran and Ch. 25: 7 tells us that he died at the age of one hundred seventy-five. We shall see that this century of faith was not a smooth rising line, but a wavy curve with as many downs as ups. Abraham doubted as much as he believed. But at some moments his faith rose above everything else and looking over the history of the world we can still see those peaks.

Let us look at the promises that God makes to Abraham, and particularly how Abraham, as a man of faith reacts to these promises. Later on we can apply the same words to our own personal lives.

This is the first promise:

“The Lord said to Abraham: “go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you.” (*Genesis 12:1-3*).

In Abraham’s experience this was the first of a series of ‘theophanies’ or divine appearances that would reoccur during his life. The important part is that there was no doubt in his mind as to who had spoken to him. When God speaks you know it.

What does God require from Abraham? He’s asking him to leave his security, to leave what he knows, to leave his home. In effect, God is asking him to leave everything that he’s known and loved -- the things that gave him security and certainty in life. And here God is quite specific -- he asks them to leave his land, his kinsfolk and even his father’s house, his family. If you like these were the places of shelter for Abraham, his “nests”. And now God is asking him to leave all this and to call into another land. The interesting thing is, God does not tell him where he is going -- he just says it is another land.

Here we have one of the most powerful elements of a practical faith in Divine Providence. To give up human security, to give up what we know and makes us feel secure, and then into the unknown, into insecurity and uncertainty.

It is interesting in the book of Genesis, but it simply says that “Abraham went as the Lord directed him”. He was 75 years old, he took his nephew Lot, he took his wife Sarah, he took his possessions and their slaves and they went in the direction of Canaan. He probably went in this direction because in the previous chapter we can read how Abraham’s father already had the intention of moving to Canaan, although he never made it there. It is as if Abraham decides to follow in the footsteps of his father without knowing if this is the right way or if he is going in the right direction. He starts out, he makes the first steps, and then he will see if God gives him a sign if he should turn right or left. All the time he has no human security. His only security is in the hand of God, in God’s guidance and in God’s promise.

The distance from Haran to Shechem, which is in Canaan, is about 600 kilometres (400 miles). The country was called Canaan because the Canaanites lived there. The Canaanites were the descendants of Canaan, who was a grandson of Noah.

“Pendulum Security”

Divine Providence requires both from us: it means giving up human security and embracing the will of God and the guidance of God even when it leads us into the darkest night. Another word for this is “pendulum security” - often used by Father Kentenich. Some people, to give themselves security, they lock themselves away in a closed room. However, “pendulum security” has a completely different dynamic. It means I can go one way or the other -- just like a pendulum in a clock -- but I am always held tightly by God. In other words, I am held from above and this is where I receive my security.

God requires this response from Abraham saw that Abraham, at the end of the day, is dependent on God and he trusts God in everything.

Let's now have a look at the second promise made to Abraham:

“The Lord appeared to Abraham and said, “to your descendants I will give this land.” So Abraham built an altar there are two the Lord who had appeared to him.” (*Genesis 12:7*).

Again and again, we encounter the basic attitude of Abraham to God; he knows that he is dependent on a higher power, he only wants what God wants him to do. In other words Abraham is the example of someone who is completely at home in the supernatural reality. God takes him by the hand and Abraham allows God to lead him and to guide him. This was his basic experience. A practical faith in Divine Providence means that we don't build on our own strength, we don't build on human supports and help, we allowed ourselves to be dependent on God.

God promises Abraham the “promised land”. If we apply this to ourselves, we could consider this “land” being a spiritual land -- the place where God has called us to be and to work for him and to minister. When Abraham hears the second promise of God what does he do? He immediately builds an altar. It is as if he claims the land for his God; guard shall rule over this land. Again and again, we need to ask ourselves what sacrifices Divine Providence demands from us and what risks we are prepared to take when God guides us?

Divine Providence is all about God's activity and guidance in our lives and also our response and availability for God's plan. Divine Providence challenges us to find a harmony between God's guidance and our availability. At the end of the day, we need to ask for this grace. The roots and the foundation of our entire spirituality is simply a heroic and practical faith in Divine Providence. Father Kentenich often said:

“Yes, Father, yes -- your will be done, if joy is mine or suffering may come!”

Leap in the Dark

A practical faith in Divine Providence always includes a “leap in the dark”. In the life of Abraham we see some of the most important aspects of a life out of Divine Providence. It always includes giving up human security, and

on the other hand, abandoning ourselves to God's gentle, loving, and all-powerful guidance. We need to consider over and over again what it means for each one of us to give up human security. Remember, when we speak about Divine Providence, we speak about faith in Divine Providence; we don't speak about the mathematical certainty of Divine Providence, i.e. it is an issue of faith and not of facts. This will always include being able and also being willing to walk into the darkness. Divine Providence will always include a leap in the dark -- a leap for our understanding, a leap for our will, and a leap for our hearts.

Our Citizenship is in heaven

It also includes trying to conform ourselves to God, and to the way God works in our lives. It's like "empathising" with the Lord and trying to understand his methods and his will. St Paul expressed this in the following way, he said: "our citizenship is in heaven!" It means that, before anything else, we are citizens of heaven and we should live like citizens of heaven. The way we speak, the way we love, the way we feel about things, our hierarchy of values should all reflect how they would be in heaven. The bottom line is: how then is where we get our standards and our values from. In other words, the "habits" of Heaven must become her habits, the standards of heaven must become her standards -- heaven is reality that calls the shots in our lives. For this reason, we try to put God at the centre of our thinking, our desires and are living. The supernatural world, and the supernatural reality should be to us like the air is to the birds or water is to the fish. In other words, we should be completely at home in the supernatural reality.

The unimaginable - The Sacrifice of Issac

That is of course, another type of test which God makes to Abraham: he asks for the life of his son. He waited so long to have a son of his own. And even when God asks this and makes this terrible test what does Abraham do? He says he is "yes" to God. God knows that he will not kill the boy, God wishes no harm to the boy, but in this way he tests Abraham again.

Abraham had received a visit from three strangers who had promised him that his wife and son. Sarah was listening to this and she started to laugh

because she could simply not believe that they could have a child. One year later, Sarah gives birth to a boy and Abraham rejoices -- he is the son of promise. And there is something absolutely terrible happens -- a test from God that cannot be understood. What does God demand? God asks Abraham to sacrifice his own son -- Isaac was probably around 17 at this time. God demands his willingness even to this extent. God demands a limitless trust in his guidance: even when he cannot understand why God asks this of him, God still asks him to surrender his son; even when he cannot bring himself to do such a thing, God still demands it; even when his heart is breaking, God asks Abraham to do the unthinkable.

Divine Providence is when we are prepared to give up all human securities and make a leap of faith. It means being willing to take a risk with nothing to hold on to except the Lord. At the end of the day it all boils down to this. It is a mixture of these two virtues. You need them both. And both aren't easy.

What human security would we have to give up? The right to know: we often don't know exactly all the information. We have to give up knowing what the outcome will be and what it will cost us. You don't know how long it will last, or when or where the good result will be.

Practical Faith in Divine Providence lives from risk-taking. There will also be a tension between Divine light and human darkness, between Divine certainty and human insecurity, between Divine strength and human weakness. Divine Providence is always the risk-taking of being willing to "say yes", it is a leap-in-the-dark.

Getting closer to the God of My Life

Three things should be present in our spiritual lives. Three truths, three convictions. We strive to live from these convictions.

1. God is active in my life. He has always been active, he is and he always will be. He is there for us. He wants to be with us. He is interested, he guides, he heals, he talks to me throughout the day. He shields us and he wants us to grow and become the person he sees in us.

St Augustine compared history to a beautiful tapestry. God sees the tapestry from the picture side. He sees the whole picture. We see it from the other side. We see the coloured threads – some light, some dark.

Sometimes we struggle to understand the picture that the threads are making. Now and again we catch a glimpse of the tapestry from the other side. The mixed up threads become a harmony.

How do we pray? This should have a great effect on our prayer life. Sometimes I struggle to give anyone in confession more than one prayer, because there is always the danger that we rush through it. God is active in my life means that he is real for me, he is a real person.

2. He is active in my life, because he loves me. This is the ultimate reason. Everything and anything he does in my life it is because of love.

We need to be convinced on two things for everyday life: First, God loves me personally. Heroism of holiness begins with really being convinced of this truth. Do you believe this? I don't think that you believe this. Secondly, I can do something for him. He wants my co-operation.

Listen to St Paul – this is what kept him going:

Galatians 2:20

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”.

Listen to Mary of Nazareth:

Luke 1:49

“...for the Mighty One has done great things for me - holy is his name”.

When we really believe these two things everything beautiful and noble in us comes alive. You couldn't love yourself more than God loves you.

3. He is active in my life mainly through people. And these people are not all saints, they are just like me. They have sins, inhibitions, weaknesses, they make mistakes, they have guilt and get it wrong. But God works in my life through them.

Is my faith mature? Remember - God does not bypass our humanity, he works through our humanity!

The drama of our times – The Separation of faith and life

A practical faith in Divine Providence wants to give a concrete answer and solution to the drama of our times as Christians: the separation between faith and real life.

This is what happens in the lives of so many Christians. They don't deny that there is a God, they know that God made the world and they know that he is present in our world. However God has really no influence in their real lives. Their daily life doesn't have a basis in faith. Their faith is shallow because they don't have a vibrant connection with God.

The challenge will always be to discover God in the great and the small of life: in my experiences, worries, marriage problems, family issues, work, office, school, university, with friends, on holiday, etc. if we can't achieve this, faith will never reach its potential in us.

The type of Christian that we need today is the one who wants to discover God's will and in knowing God's will, as far as this can be ascertained, strives to do something about it. Christians should be like Christ, and Christ's whole life and work centred around the Father.

The separation, or "divorce" between faith and life is probably the biggest challenge for today's Christians. If faith is going to survive in people's lives and flourish in the generations to come then we need to unite again the Gospel with real life experiences. We need to show how to discover God in life and in history and show that these places are important sources of our encounter with him.

What does this mean for families?

What do you think is the key to evangelizing Catholic families?

Evangelizing Catholic families is critical in our culture today. For example: to tackle a majority of the realities pertinent to Catholic family living – i.e. a refresher on the sacraments, reviewing the idea of vocations and, of

course, wrestling with the bigger teachings like understanding the truth of the Eucharist and the teachings on contraception – but it is so important to speak in a voice that would encourage people from alongside him rather than from the top down.

I believe one of the ways parents can do their part in successfully evangelizing is to first look hard at what you say you believe and compare it against how you live. In order to evangelize with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we first need to be very clear regarding what that salvation story even is. Once you know it and can appreciate the magnitude of its saving truth, sharing it with others naturally becomes easier.

Evangelizing needs to occur from multiple angles: from the homilies we hear at Mass to the way we respond to our own trials and suffering – and to the way that we love and minister to our family.

Catholic family holiness is not achieved in only one day, but rather becomes a daily pursuit worth striving for.

Holiness is not giving up on making morally correct and virtuous choices to the best of our ability for ourselves and for our families on a daily basis.

It's showing our children that the primary relationship to pursue is the one between us and Jesus Christ.

It's embracing sacrificial love and modeling that for our kids' sake.

And it's striving for consistency with the way we live out the teachings of our Catholic identity by fighting off demons like moral relativism and sexual immorality.

Making Sunday the kind of day God intends it to be is often a difficult area for our family. With five young kids, we have a tendency to always be on the go. As a growing family, what constitutes rest?

We have to be very careful not to let Sundays become last minute grocery-shopping days, frantic moments of last-minute homework and mowing lawns. I don't think we're the only ones who need to be reminded of the need to truly slow down. Our world in general has a difficult time with the idea of rest.

Focusing the day around Mass is absolutely critical. In the Eucharist, we have an opportunity to abide in Jesus as he abides in us. Helping our kids prepare for Mass in advance by reviewing the readings is of enormous help, and then making the day a day of mini-celebrations.

Though it's borderline impossible not to do some sort of work with so many kids around, we've learned (and continue to learn) of the benefit of making that a day to spend with family, resting in God and enjoying each other's company. Like many other areas of our lives, we often trip and stumble in our efforts to slow down; but as with all areas of our faith lives, we must continue to push forward and ask the Holy Spirit for the help to improve.

“Mend it - don't end it!”

We need to speak out more against Britain's liberal divorce culture, encouraging couples to “mend it – don't end it”.

We experience every day the fallout from these broken relationships.

There are an estimated 3.8million children currently caught up in the family justice system. I personally think that's a complete scandal.

Our focus is on the children. The Church unashamedly advocates marriage as the “gold standard” for couples where children are involved. For us, marriage is the best way to bring up children.

Couples need to be encouraged not to have children unless their relationship is stable – and if it is stable, to provide extra stability through marriage.

Couples ‘falling out of love’ now main reason for divorce. Affairs are no longer the top reason for couples divorcing, with “falling out of love” replacing it, according to a survey of lawyers.

Infidelity has topped the list since the survey began in 2003 but this year “growing apart” or “falling out of love” was given as the most common reason.

One counsellor with Relate said it was common for couples to say they loved each other but were no longer “in love”.

What's normally the case is that their relationship has slid down their list of priorities, replaced by the pressures of work, money worries or raising a family. Relationships need attention and time to nurture otherwise couples can easily drift apart. Love your spouse, love your children and love your marriage!

A senior family judge said divorce has become a "form-filling exercise" which is easier than getting a driving licence. A divorce can go through in just six weeks.

Lawyers say January is traditionally the busiest for divorce petitions. Due to tension in families over the Christmas period, January sees the number of enquiries double – with the first working day of the year being the busiest.

Divine Providence gives us the strength to "walk with God" and do something about the source of divorce and the so common 'recycling' attitudes in ending relationships. We need to change our priorities.

Same-Sex Marriage?

Be believe that marriage is a commitment for life between one Man and one Woman in a covenant of love and life.

Marriage is more than having one's love for another legally recognized. It has been protected and supported by the law because governments have recognized its contribution to the good of society. The family based on strong, happy marriages plays a unique role in generating children and providing the best environment in which children can be nurtured and educated. It helps to ensure the future and wellbeing of society.

The relationship between a man and a woman cannot be the same as between two men or two women," the letter continued. Only the love of a man and a woman in marriage makes one flesh, and it is the intimacy of a man and woman that creates new life.

Marriage is so different that it is actually unjust to treat it as the same as any other sexual relationship. Men and women who are homosexual and those in same-sex relationships must be treated with compassion, respect and sensitivity. However, it does not respect or serve anyone to deny them the

right to the truth about what marriage is and about what the Church teaches on sexuality and marriage.

As never before, marriage needs to be understood and honored so that it can achieve the human good for which God has designed it.

This is not a matter of 'marriage equality' nor of human rights, since the right to be married extends equally, but only to those who are qualified. A 12 year-old can't marry because they don't have the qualifications, someone who is already married cannot marry for a second, third, or fourth time and have various marriages all going at the same time, because they do not meet the qualifications. I cannot marry my cousin, because it does not meet the qualifications. Two homosexual women cannot marry because they can't have sexual intercourse and they can't conceive children and there exists no complementarity.

Same-sex marriage creates a clash between upholding the human rights of children with respect to their coming into being and the family structure in which they will be reared, and the claims of homosexual adults who wish to marry a same-sex partner.

It forces us to choose between giving priority to children's rights or to homosexual adults' claims.

Opposite sex marriage does not raise this conflict, because children's rights and adults' claims with respect to marriage are consistent.

Same-sex marriage necessarily negates the rights of all children with respect to their biological origins and natural families, not just those born into same-sex marriages.

The "political elite" of our country are desiring to see a change based on their own ideological viewpoint. They affirm the view that one or other of a child's parents are dispensable to their upbringing. Surely this is contrary to the best interests of children, who have the right and should have the chance to be brought up with, and have access to, the masculinity of their father and the femininity of their mother.

The Canadian Civil Marriage Act 2005, which legalised same-sex marriage, demonstrates this in providing that in certain legislation the term "natural parent" is to be replaced by "legal parent". In short, the adoption exception -- that who is a child's parent is established by legal fiat, not biological connection -- becomes the norm for all children.

In the same vein, some Canadian provincial legislation replaces the words "mother" and "father" on a birth certificate with "Parent 1" and "Parent 2". And an Ontario court has ruled that a child can have three legal parents: her biological mother and her lesbian partner, and her gay biological father who donated sperm.

It's true that some opposite-sex marriages do not or cannot result in children. But they do negate the norms, values and symbolism established by opposite-sex marriage with respect to children's human rights in regard to their natural parents and families, as same-sex marriage necessarily does.

If we can modify marriage to include one particular sexual minority, then why not change it to include any other? if the complementarity of man and woman in marriage can be defined away, then why not the specification that only two people can formal a conjugal union?

Conform to Jesus and His Message

We try, with the help of God's grace and mercy, to conform our lives to Jesus and his message.

the problem is not homophobia but theophobia -- a hatred by some of God, faith, religion, and the Church - our goal was pro-marriage, never anti-gay.

The Church 60 years ago fought widespread, no-fault divorce, convinced it would lead to a cheapening of the marriage bond and harm our kids -- as, of course, scholarly studies now report has, indeed, happened," he said. "Recall how the Church resisted the 'contraceptive mentality,' fearing it would rupture the sacred bond between love and the procreation of children. Then, remember how the Church sounded the alarm over rising

rates of promiscuity, adultery, pre-marital sex, and cohabitation prior to or instead of marriage.

And now we ring the steeple bell again at this latest dilution of the authentic understanding of marriage, worried that the next step will be another redefinition to justify multiple partners and infidelity.

By the way, in warning about promiscuity, divorce, cohabitation instead of marriage, adultery, and 'same-sex' marriage, the Church is hardly some shrill, bitter, reactionary, and obsessive prude, but actually **prophetically right-on-target**.

Recent studies ... show that the weakening of stable marriage and families is the cause of most social and cultural woes, especially burdensome on poor women and children.

The archbishop's last word was for Catholic faithful: "For us in the Church, not much changes," he said. "We continue to hold fast to the God-given definition of marriage, and acknowledge that no unfortunate legislative attempt can alter reality and morality."

There is a big "catechetical challenge, in that we have to admit that quite a few people no longer hold to this timeless moral truth."

We try our best to witness to the truth, encouraging our married couples and their kids to be loving, radiant, 'lights to the world and salt of the earth.' As Jesus challenges us what is the use of a light if it is hidden under a tub,; what is the use of salt if it is tasteless?

We acknowledge that, as St. Augustine taught, if something is wrong, even if everybody else is doing it, it's still wrong; and, if something is right, even if nobody else is doing it anymore, it's still right.

Like St. Thomas More, we're willing to take the heat and even lose our head from following a conscience properly formed by God's revelation and the teaching of his Church, even if it is politically incorrect, and clashes with the King's demands to re-define marriage.

People of Divine Providence

Our greatest need in the present times is the search for people who make God credible in the world by means of their living with the God of life.

We need people who keep their eyes fixed on God, learning from God's message of love with true humanity means.

We need people whose minds are inspired by the wisdom that comes from faith in God, people whose hearts are opened by God, so that they, in turn, can open the hearts and minds of others.

Our Roadmap

Three important signposts:

Father Kentenich showed the Church and the world again Our Lady - not as a plaster-of-paris statue, but as a determined, prophetic and courageous woman. Remember the wedding feast at Cana. Mary instructs the staff: **'Do whatever it is He says.'** Period. These are history's last recorded words from Mary. 'Do what he says.' Granted, on the surface, Mary is telling the staff to listen to Jesus' request about the wine. I suggest we look just beneath the surface and we will find the single greatest piece of advice ever; 'Do whatever it is He says.' If only all of us would 'do what He says,' no matter what the situation, challenge, problem, temptation or difficulty, how different, how much better, our lives and our world would be.

Second; the story of the Pope and Saint Francis. When Francis approached Innocent III for approval of his new way of life, the Pope demanded to see Francis' programme his strategy, his charter. At which Francis pulled out from his brown, coarse and worn habit the book of the Gospels. **'Here is my programme!'** he replied. That story strengthens my belief that who we are must always come before what we do; that we must be faithful; that we must cast out to the deep; that we are called to be saints; that we must walk on the water through the winds and waves, eyes always focused on Jesus, and everything else will fall into place. Maybe, just maybe, I suggest, we all need to concentrate on His plan, not our plan. When I read the Bible I ask

how I can change my life to conform to the teaching of God's word, not how I can revise the message to make me more comfortable. I try to refine my beliefs, to make sure they are in obedience to the timeless truths of faith, and not critique the doctrine itself and The Word itself to see how it fails to soothe my modern ears. Hold dear the Gospels and, like Francis, shout out that this is the only 'plan' we need - the only Plan, that will make any difference!

And thirdly, remember the disciples **walking to Emmaus**. When we were in the Holy Land with our priests' course, I always wanted to walk that road. Unfortunately, the road doesn't exist anymore and we don't know exactly where it would have been situated. For me this is a symbol that all our roads are Emmaus.

We walk with Jesus - often hidden and we don't recognise him and he explains things to us. Let's not turn inward to ourselves, our worries, our burdens, our fears; but rather let us turn to Him, the way, the truth and the life, the One who told us over and over, 'Be not afraid;' who assured us that He 'would be with us all days, even to the end of the world;' and who promised us that 'not even the gates of hell would prevail!'

That is practical faith in Divine Providence!