**Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ**
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# Wedding of Fraser Jon van der Watt and Roxanne Fagri

**Date:** Friday, September 23, 2022 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
**First Reading:** Song of Songs 2:8–10, 14, 16a, 8:6–7a
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 145:8-9, 10, 15, 17-18 | **Response:** Psalm 145:9a
**Second Reading:** Romans 15:1b-3a, 5–7, 13
**Gospel Acclamation:** 1 John 4:8b, 11
**Gospel Reading:** John 15:9-12
**Preached at:** Church of the Beatitudes in Zwavelpoort **in the** Archdiocese of Pretoria, South Africa**.**

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You are all welcome to this glorious place of great joy and hope for the union we are about to witness. We are all gathered here to share in this joyous occasion together and to celebrate the love that Fraser and Roxanne both share for each other.

The readings we have just heard all speak about love. In the first reading we heard how deep waters cannot quench love, nor floods sweep it away. We can hear Fraser and Roxanne say to each other: “your voice is sweet, and you are lovely, my lover belongs to me and I to thee” But we know that the Lord is compassionate towards all his works. And in his compassion we believe that Roxanne and Fraser were made for each other, and that today, what we are witnessing in their union is the completion of God’s plan.

Each of you Roxanne and Fraser, have different strengths and abilities, and yet God has called you together to complement and help each other through life. Your gifts, your differences, are not threats to you both, but rather opportunities to feel and be completed. Make a conscious effort to give to and serve each other, and you will know the unifying grace of love as you feel completed by each other. St Ignatius of Loyola once said that love is shown more in deeds than in words. We will hear many beautiful words today, but love is a deed, it is an act of service to the other, a self-service for the other, a gesture to the other. The first gesture is precisely that departure from your families and your previous life, to come together and start a new life together, a new family together.

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Today is just one day, they say a wedding is a day, but a marriage is a lifetime. Perhaps it is easy to give and to serve today. But what you are about to commit yourself to, is a lifelong commitment to give and to serve, to love and be loved, to forgive and to say sorry not just today, but in all your days.

At times, this might become difficult. But in our second reading we hear how Fraser and Roxanne are called to be a welcoming couple. Welcoming each other as husband and wife means being open to the growth that will occur in each other because of living together. It means accepting and learning to love each other's quirks and annoying habits, right along with the things you really like about each other. Of course, one of the best and most challenging gifts of marriage is the welcoming of children. Nothing quite changes your life like becoming a parent or a stepparent. And as children grow, so must parents.

This afternoon, in just a moment, you are pledging to not just love each other as you are now, but to continue to make a choice to love each other, 1 year, 10 years, 50 years from now.

This is not possible to do unless you draw strength from God and God's church. God loves you and offers you his mercy. Because mercy is the shape love takes when confronted by a sinner. If God is prepared to forgive you – I beg you, please be prepared to forgive each other, to love each other. As we heard in the Psalm, the Lord is good to all and compassionate toward all his works. Imitate God in your marriage, include God in your decisions, and you will find that God gives you the graces and strength you need to remain united, to remain in love. The life of a Christian, indeed of anyone in relationship with God, is a life spent in practicing how to love. As husband and wife, you will take your friendship to the deepest and most profound level. As we celebrate your love for each other, you will have the duty and the desire to find new ways of loving each other each day. As you grow older what may initially have attracted you to each other will fade, but that is the opportunity for you to see more deeply into each other's souls and love each other more perfectly. You will find it helpful to have a joint life project – something that can keep bringing you together and helping you to be creative and fruitful. Alongside your children, the pursuit of love, and a relationship with God can be the uniting force that constantly allows you to renew your love for each other. Never let religion get in the way of your relationship with God. You are called to love each other as you are, because God already loves you as you are. And because he loves you, he has made each of you the

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means of each other's salvation. Your vocation in marriage will be realized in how you save each other's souls and help each other relax into God's loving presence in your lives together.

Christians have long believed that human persons bear the Imago Dei, the image of God. May you each in your own way, strive every day to be that image of God for each other: to light and illumine, to help and protect, to support and encourage, to love and be loved. In this relationship, God can only act in and through you. Allow yourselves to witness and testify to God's love for you and for each other.

You both have earnestly prepared yourselves and desire to be married before your family, your friends, and God. Your love for each other is so strong that you cannot keep it to yourselves. Love is, in fact, infectious. When people see other people in love, their spirits are lifted. Indeed, as I look out today to you all here, I can only see smiles and joyful expressions. It is in this context of pure love and total freedom, supported by friends and family, that you are going to declare your love for each other in the form of a Vow.

Vows are sacred and solemn oaths, not lightly undertaken. In just a moment, we will all hear you pronounce your wedding vows. Just as God made a covenant with his people, you are making a covenant with each other. Your words do not just echo through this church this afternoon, but they will echo into eternity. We live in an age where autonomy and freedom are seen to be absolute values. The paradox of this is that the greatest gift one can give is to freely give up their freedom – to bind oneself to another for life- and yet this is seen often in our culture as a gift too impossible to contemplate. This gift only makes sense if it is done, as you are doing, out of love. Your decision today to enter into a Christian Marriage is a powerful counter-cultural witness to the grace of love.

When you say 'until death do us part', you are vowing your freedom and fidelity to each other, and to help each other and love each other every day for the rest of your lives, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. Christian marriage is not imposed upon persons from the outside. It can only ever be freely chosen. Chesterton once said that "it is the nature of love to bind itself, and the institution of marriage merely paid the average person the compliment of taking them at their word." I do not like it when people say that their wedding day was the highlight of their married life together. If that were so, then

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everything else from now on would be downhill! No – not at all! The wedding day is a beginning, a special moment to be sure, but one that captures the great, glorious, and generous desires you have for each other. In this moment, when you are enamoured with each other and surrounded by your loved ones, you choose to declare your love and your desire to never be apart again, as we heard in the Gospel. The Church then serves as a reminder of this moment.

In declaring that marriage is lifelong, she does not add any burden or weight, but merely stands as testament to the vows that you yourselves make. Of course your vows are not just words – but rather they are words that represent actions. You have chosen Jesus Christ as your model of how to love, and His actions will surely guide you.

We rejoice together that you have found in each other your soul-mate, your best friend, your companion, and we give thanks to God for the families that have nurtured you both, and raised you so responsibly, and modelled for you how to love so freely and generously, in good times and in bad.

In closing, I have only two pieces of advice. [And I'm going to need some help with this, so if I can ask my helper to please come up and assist me. Thank you Joshua.]

The first that you never forget these four phrases when dealing with each other. They are very simply, "Please", "Thank you", "Sorry", and "I love you". In always saying "please" you will protect yourself from becoming overbearing or entitled. In always saying 'thank you' you will save yourself from becoming selfish as you renew your dependence on each other. In always saying 'sorry' quickly when you are wrong or mistaken, you will be able to give the other gift of forgiving you, which will lead to harmony, peace and greater unity. In always saying 'I love you' you will be reminded to not just say the words, but to show your love in concrete ways.

The second piece of advice is that you always remember to pray together. For with God nothing is impossible, and what God has joined together, no person can divide.

And so, as in recent years, and now for the rest of your lives, you are, with God, each other's Number One priority and concern. I pray that this new married relationship that you will forge will continue to deepen and strengthen, and bear

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much fruit.

On behalf of everyone here, I wish you well and pray that God will seal your love and sanctify you both and bless you and your family abundantly, this day and every day.

Amen.

[* A dispensation was granted to solemnise the Wedding at *Lace on Timber*.]

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