

Sunday Message from Fr William for Third Sunday of Easter 2024

*The 'Other World' continued from 07.04.24*

Dear People of St Mary's

I began these reflections on the 'other world' by asking the question: Who is going to be there? (See 2 July 2023). Well, the answer is 'lots of people'. As I wrote in that opening reflection, we have the capacity for an almost limitless number of personal relationships. It is through these relationships that we grow and flourish and progress towards fulfilment in this world, and attain perfect fulfilment in the 'other world'.

In the Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes*, the second chapter is titled 'The Community of Mankind'. Man is created for uniqueness and for freedom (see 7 April 2024). But in this chapter on the Community of Mankind, the Council teaches us that Man is also created for self-giving, that his basic orientation is towards self-giving, and that he finds his ultimate fulfilment only in self-giving. 'Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.' (*Gaudium et Spes* 24).

This is true, in particular, of marriage. Husband and wife, in an act of total self-giving, give themselves to each other unconditionally, and from their own personal freedom, and for the rest of their lives in this world. And this is the first example of 'community' I wanted to look at with you, an example of community that leads towards the personal fulfilment of each in this world, and also points in its own very specific way to the eschatological fulfilment of the 'other world'. (See 7 April 2024).

Now we probably don't generally refer to marriage as an example of 'community'. But marriage exemplifies most especially the characteristics that we normally associate with community: a shared life, shared values, mutual support, love. It is indeed a community, the first and primordial community. It is in the first place a community of two, and although the family unit may be augmented and enriched by offspring, and although marriage also forms a kind of building block within the larger community of society, it remains at its core a community of two. (See *Gaudium et Spes* 47).

But there is more. In Judaeo-Christian tradition, confirmed by Christ, husband and wife, in this mutual self-giving that is free, unconditional, total, and for life, become *one body, one flesh*. (Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:6). This makes marriage, at least in this world, not just a community, but the ultimate community. And it is the ultimate example, at least in this world, of that same principle quoted above from the Second Vatican Council. 'Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.' (GS 24).

What about our sexuality – our maleness and femaleness. These are foundational to marriage. Why? Well, for biological and reproductive complementarity, of course. But our maleness and femaleness are foundational to marriage in a more fundamental way, that takes the understanding of our sexuality to an even more profound level...

*to be continued...*



14<sup>th</sup> April 2024