
Always. With. Wonder.

A Wedding Homily

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Based on 1 Corinthians 13

We have just heard one of the most beautiful passages in all of human literature. Paul's hymn to love has been read at weddings for centuries, and we never quite tire of it — perhaps because it describes something we have glimpsed but cannot quite hold onto.

Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

It sounds perfect. And in a surprising way, that makes it a little frightening.

We know ourselves. We know the mornings when we are not patient, the evenings when we are not kind. Yet here you stand, making the most audacious promise two people can make to one another.

Sam Wells, the vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London, once suggested that three small words can quietly unravel a marriage. Leave them behind, he says, as you step into this new life — and replace them with three others. I think St. Paul would agree.

The first word to leave behind is “if.”

We are creatures of conditions. *If* you are kind to me, I will be kind to you. *If* you stay the person I fell in love with, I will stay in love with you. Contingency may serve us well in many areas of life. In marriage, it is slow death.

Paul does not write, “*Love is patient, if the other person deserves it.*” He writes as though love were not a contract at all, but a covenant — not a calculation, but a calling.

This is why the vows you are about to make speak of “*as long as you both shall live.*” Not “*I will love you when things are good.*” For better, for worse. For richer, for poorer. In sickness and in health. **Always.**

This is also how God loves — not conditionally, not with a ledger open on the desk. Every morning you choose *always* over *if*, you are practicing the shape of divine love.

The second word to leave behind is “for.”

“*I have done so much for you.*” “*After everything I have sacrificed for this family.*” These sentences begin as expressions of love and curdle, over time, into resentment — like water building silently behind a dam. The word *for* turns love into a transaction, the other person into a recipient, the relationship into a ledger of debts and credits.

The word to replace it with is **with**.

I am doing this *with* you — because you are my companion, my partner, my beloved. The goal is never to do it efficiently. The goal is to do it together.

This is how God chooses to be with us. The name Emmanuel means not *God administering things on our behalf from a careful distance*, but *God with us* — present, alongside, in it together. God did not watch from the far bank. He waded in.

The third word to leave behind is “ask.”

We ask many things of the people we love. We ask them to explain themselves, to be consistent, to make sense. Underneath all that asking is a quiet anxiety: *I need to have you figured out*. But comprehension is not communion. And the person beside you is not a puzzle waiting to be solved.

The word to replace it with is **wonder**.

To wonder at your spouse is to resist the urge to reduce them — to refuse the sentence “*I know exactly who you are*” and choose instead to keep looking, keep discovering, keep being surprised. The person beside you today is an image of God. And images of God take a lifetime to read.

The mystics have always said that learning to love another human being — imperfectly, stubbornly, with all the frustration and tenderness that entails — is one of the primary ways we learn to love God. Every time you choose wonder over certainty, you are training your soul for prayer.

Love never ends.

Prophecies will cease. Tongues will fall silent. Knowledge will pass away. But love — patient, unconditional, self-giving, wondering love — love abides.

You are not here today because you have mastered this. None of us has. You are here because you have chosen to try — together, with everything you are, for as long as you both shall live.

Mary Frances. Andrew. Those of us gathered here came today as witnesses. But we leave as something more — reminded, by the courage of your promise, that this kind of love is possible. That it is worth attempting. That it is, in fact, what we are all made for.

So go. Love each other well. And when you forget how — and you will forget, because we all do — come back to these three small words.

Always — so you need not fear the future.

With — so you need never face it alone.

Wonder — so it remains, to the very end, an adventure.

Amen.