Hamer Family Wedding Homilies

Andrew Murray SM
Marriage and Hope
Homily for the Wedding of Murray Hamer and Jackie Okley
Andrew Murray SM
23 September 2001

As we gather to celebrate the marriage of Murray and Jackie, we cannot but be aware of the clouds that are gathering around us – clouds of war in response to the terrorism unleashed in the United States under two weeks ago. In this context, I want to propose to you that we think about the marriage of Jackie and Murray as an act of hope and as an act that should give hope to us all.

Hope is a kind of desire, but it is a special kind. We do not hope for frivolous things. Writing in the thirteenth century, Saint Thomas Aquinas defined the special nature of hope on the basis of the kinds of things that we hope for. He suggested that the things for which we hope have four distinct characteristics.

We hope only for good things. Perhaps this goes without saying, and the opposite of hope in this sense is fear of evil. We hope only for things that are in the future. We take joy in things that are present. We hope only for things that are arduous or difficult to achieve. It does not make sense to hope for trifles. Finally, we hope only for things that are possible. In this sense, the opposite of hope is despair. (Summa Theologica I-II q. 40)

I have not asked Murray and Jackie what their hopes are in terms of this kind of analysis. In fact, they can speak for themselves later, and there are many things that they might say. At the basis of them all, however, will be a hope something like this: to be able to live a life together so that at the end of life they will be better persons than if they had lived alone and will have made the world a better place.

Today we see not the fulfilment of this hope but the promise; we participate in a beginning, not in an ending. In a few moments, Jackie and Murray will articulate that promise in the vows they make to one another. We will all be witnesses as by so doing they confer the sacrament of marriage on one another.

The life they are entering offers much to hope for. They hope for something that is good – human excellence and the happiness that will flow from it both for themselves and for their children. They hope for something in the future – what they are to become is yet to be achieved and will be measured towards the end of their lives. They hope for something that will be difficult. Human beings, although they need one another do not live together easily. Achievement will demand self-denial and accommodation of one another’s needs and aspirations in differing circumstances. We know of failure in marriage, and we also know, in the absence of failure, of lack of success. Finally, they hope for something that is possible. There are many good examples of such a life lived well around them, and I am happy to attest that they have begun well by attending marriage preparation courses and by talking carefully with one another.

What we are witnessing today is not only an act of hope; it is a sign of hope for us all.

Hope falls differently to different ages. Young children do not hope. They are full of desires and wishes, for which they expect ready satisfaction from parents, aunts and uncles and grandparents. Young adults are full of hope, and their eyes are set on the future. In midlife, hopes are worked out, and life is often arduous. With maturity, comes enjoyment of those things that have been achieved. In old age, hope is for others, except for that final hope, the hope for divine things and for eternal life, the hope where all hopes lead.

There are many things indicated in this marriage for us all to hope for. We hope that we might all lead good lives. We hope that human beings might be able to live together. We hope that our Christian community might be vigorous and harmonious. In fact, in his Letter to the Ephesians (5: 31-32), Saint Paul suggested that the fact that people can live well together in marriage is a sign that the Church can be a community based on love. We hope that the world might be at peace. We hope that each of us will one day be with God in eternal life.
There is one final hope that I want to mention today. When Jackie and Murray bring children into the world, those children will see the world afresh, and they will live to make it good. As each of us has journeyed through life, we have learnt things and formed habits that enable us to act easily and well, but even that learning and those habits cut us off from being able to adapt easily to new situations and new circumstances. When children come into the world, they take the world as they find it and work their lives out from there. That is how human life renews itself.
In the first book of his great work on justice, *The Republic*, Plato had his characters display contrary views about what justice is. They are not views that he himself could accept, but they form the backdrop against which he investigates the possibility of justice being attained and of the conditions necessary for it to flourish.

I want to consider four of these views about justice that were circulating in the Greek world in the Fourth Century BC. The first is the view of Cephalus, a successful and retired businessman, who asserts that justice lies in paying our debts and telling the truth (331B). In old age, he spends much of his time making offerings to the gods. The second is the view of Polemarchus, his son, who says that justice lies in ‘rending each his due’, which he takes to mean that one should do good to the good and harm to the bad (331D). He identifies the good with his friends and the bad with his enemies. The third is the view of Thrasymachus, a travelling teacher of rhetoric, who argues that justice consists in the advantage experienced by those who are strongest (337D). Then adding a political dimension, he expands this into the fourth view by showing that the strong make the laws, so that justice consists in following the law (338D).

I can almost hear the mother of the bride and my dear cousin, thinking, ‘He’s been on holidays, and he has forgotten what he is doing. What has justice got to do with marriage?’ Now that is a big question, and the answer might be different in every case, but today we are here to celebrate a particular marriage, the marriage of Sadie and Tim. I want to claim that justice has everything to do with Tim and Sadie and that I expect that it will have a great deal to do with their marriage.

I am thinking here of Tim’s work with the Inspire Foundation and of Sadie’s legal work, both of which have to do with helping the marginalised in our society. Inspire works through the Internet to help young people help themselves, especially in tough times. It was set up as a response to Australia’s high rate of youth suicide (www.inspire.org.au). Sadie started out in Legal Aid and, among other things, has worked for the Aboriginal Legal Service and travelled to desperate country towns to help alleviate the strife in people’s lives. Now she works with the disability section of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Plato’s strong claim in *The Republic* is that justice is so great a thing that, even if their lives are full of misfortune, those who possess it are much happier than those who are unjust yet fortunate in that many worldly goods come to them (360E – 362C). I do not wish Tim and Sadie misfortune, but I do know that they are not planning buy a mansion at Palm Beach, because they are about more serious things. Even Plato recognised that there could not be a perfect society in which justice would be achieved for all. If justice is to be achieved to the best possible degree, at least some who are strong must work for the good of those who are weak. Sadie and Tim have been doing just that, and, I am sure, will continue to do so. I wish them well. May they have the reward of seeing good done. We all have every reason to be grateful to them.

In the face of lives like these, the views of Plato’s opponents and, indeed, of large parts of our society today are shown up. Cephalus may have paid his debts and told the truth, but his constant offerings to the gods suggest that he knows that something has been left out. Polemarchus’ way of ‘rendering to each his due’ reeked of self-interest and of a simplistic notion of good and evil. Thrasymachus’ views are in the daily headlines. In Bush’s America, it is the strong that rule, and their only measure of right is their own interests. Our own Minister for Immigration justifies his actions as conforming to the law, yet manipulatively changes that law to meet his own ends.

What first sparked these thoughts was the choice that Sadie and Tim made for the Gospel of their wedding. The beatitudes (Matt 5: 1 – 12) go right to the heart of the teaching and mission of Jesus, which was to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Although this Kingdom will be complete only in the next world, it is intimated in this world when people are in harmony with God and with one another, in other words, when the great commandment of love is fulfilled.
The teaching of Jesus is very radical, so radical, in fact, that Saint Matthew softened it in his Gospel. It is sharper in Luke (6: 20 –26), where Jesus says ‘Happy are the poor’, ‘Happy are the hungry’, ‘Happy are those who weep’ for ‘theirs is the Kingdom of God’. Now, Jesus does not mean that it is good to be poor or to be hungry or to weep. What he means is that the Kingdom is such that the poor will be heard and the hungry will be fed and the sorrowful will be comforted. It is a condition of the Kingdom being present that these things happen.

The Kingdom of God is not always clearly present in the world. It is not identical with the Church, for the Church is rather a means to the Kingdom, and the Church has come on hard times. Our world, too, has hardened and we are experiencing dark times. But there will be light as long as there are people like Tim and Sadie to inspire us, as they have inspired me.

When we say that marriage is a sacrament, we mean that it is a sign that brings with it what it signifies. Different marriages can be signs in different ways. The marriage of Sadie and Tim, I pray, will be a sign of the Kingdom of God and a sign of justice in that deepest sense that our civilisation has sought for millennia.
Marriage and Friendship
Homily for the Wedding of Cassie Hamer and Sam Dickerson
Andrew Murray SM
25 August 2007

The readings that we have just heard were chosen by Sam and Cassie to express their understanding of how they stand in relation to one another and of what the commitment that they are making to one another today means.

The themes that run through these readings are the themes of love and of friendship, and these in the context of marriage. I want to begin by thinking about friendship, and here I turn to my old friend Aristotle, who in his work, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, thought friendship important enough to dedicate two of the ten books to it. Although he drew on the thought of his predecessors, Aristotle said first many of the things on which subsequent reflection in our civilisation has hinged.

Aristotle’s definition of friendship is apparently simple. He says in summary:

‘So friends must be well disposed towards each other, and recognised as wishing each other’s good.’ (VIII, 2: 1156a4)

The good disposition is love or affection and it is mutual, not one-sided. It is recognised rather than held privately in the recesses of our hearts – unrequited love is not friendship. And most fundamentally, it is the wish for the good of the other, not to possess the other but to ensure that all that is good comes to the other.

Experience seems to tell us that friendship is surely a little bit more complicated than this, and Aristotle takes account of this by distinguishing three essentially different kinds of friendship on the grounds of the basis of the formation of friendship. The first of these friendships is based on pleasure, and Aristotle suggests that these are more frequently begun by young people, who readily find enjoyment in each other’s company. The second kind of friendship is that based on utility or usefulness. ‘A friend in need is a friend indeed’ runs the English proverb, which recognises that often people come together largely because they need one another for a variety of reasons, and so the relationship is useful to them both. Aristotle thinks that these friendships are more common among older people. The third kind of friendship is that based on goodness and specifically on the goodness in the character of the person who is loved. This kind of friendship endures beyond the span of pleasure or usefulness.

Aristotle says much else about friendship. I would like to give you just a taste:

‘Friendship in the primary and proper sense is between good people in virtue of their goodness, whereas the rest are friendships only by analogy.’ (VIII, 4; 1157a33)

‘That friendships based on goodness are rare is natural, because people of this kind are few. And in addition these friendships need time and intimacy.’ (VIII, 3; 1156b25)

‘Friendship also seems to be the bond that holds communities together, and lawgivers seem to attach more importance to it than to justice.’ (VIII, 1; 1155a23)

‘So if friendship consists more in loving than in being loved, and if people are commended for loving their friends, it seems that loving is the distinctive virtue of friends. Thus it is when love is given in accordance with merit that people remain friends and their friendship endures.’ (VIII, 8; (1159a33 – 37)
These thoughts are, I believe, sufficient to show that in situating their marriage in the context of friendship, Sam and Cassie have set themselves a high ideal. There is no question that they do not love one another, but are they yet friends? Those of us who have seen them together would instinctively say, ‘yes, of course they are friends’. They enjoy doing things together and spending time with one another. But what kind of friends are they? Do they share friendship based on pleasure? Here, I think that we would have to say yes, even if only because of their youth. They have a lot of energy for activity, for talking and for meeting people. Do they share friendship based on utility? Perhaps; it is cheaper to travel in one car than in two. But they will experience more of this as they get older and as mutual responsibilities draw them to lean on one another more heavily. Do they share friendship based on goodness of character?

Here, I feel the need for caution, and that for two reasons. Firstly, the manner of a friendship is deeply personal to the persons involved, and we should always hesitate to judge what we are not party to. Secondly, a simple yes or no would be inadequate. A simple yes would probably ring hollow, but if we were to say no, we may well have to ask why we are here today and why have Cassie and Sam given us these readings on which to reflect.

What way out of this dilemma do we have? Let me suggest this. I believe that Sam and Cassie have begun a friendship based on goodness. They have glimpsed the goodness in each other and are responding to it. But in their lives this kind of friendship is so far only intimated. The ideal that they express today is the hope of spending their lives coming to know one another and coming to see one another’s goodness more clearly. This project will have its disappointments when one or other reacts poorly to some incident, but it will also have its delights when difficulties are resolved and new solutions found.

We should also remember that character is not static. Cassie and Sam will develop, and not only will each develop his or her character, but they will develop together. Neither will be neutral observers, but in their love of one another, they will want to see the best for one another. And so, the answer to our question of whether their friendship is one based on goodness of character is something that only they will be able to answer and that only after they have lived a significant part of their lives together. We can support them in their quest.

I would like to conclude with one other thought from Aristotle:

‘The affection of husband for wife [is not] the same as that of wife for husband. For each of these persons has a different excellence and function, and different reasons for feeling love; and therefore their loves and affections are different too. It follows, then, that the parties do not, and should not expect to, receive the same benefits each from the other.’ (VIII, 7; 1158b18 – 22)

Part of the wonder of love between a woman and a man is that that love will always be for a person who perceives and feels differently from oneself. That love become friendship entails a profound appreciation, respect and fascination for one who will always be different from oneself. It should be our prayer today that Sam and Cassie will achieve this in their life together.