

Carmelite Church, Whitefriar Street, Dublin @ 3pm

Fr. James Eivers O.Carm. – Prior

Fr. Éanna O hÓbáin O.Carm – Parish Priest

Fr. Martin – Liturgical MC

Tony Shanahan: Executive Director, Accord CLG

Jennifer Griffin: CEO, Relationship Care, Dublin & Jim Adams, Marriage & Education Manager

Introduction:

It's a great joy as always to celebrate Mass here in the beautiful Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on Whitefriar Street. The Carmelites came here 200 years ago and the foundation stone for this powerful edifice of worship was laid in 1826. I thank the Prior, Fr. James Eivers and the Carmelite team here for the warm welcome and generous hospitality.

This is the church obviously associated with the relics of St. Valentine. Just before Mass over at the shrine I was delighted to bless the engagement ring of an engaged couple, David Higgins and Lauren Stewart. At that shrine the relics have been venerated since the 1950's. I have been coming to the Shrine for this particular ceremony for many years now and I am always moved by the number of couples and individuals who call in to spend quiet time there.

In our Mass we pray for David & Lauren and all others preparing for the sacrament of marriage. I welcome those who have come here today especially to renew their vows, their love, their commitment to one another. You also are very much in my prayers. In today's first reading we hear from the Book of Kings, Solomon has displeased the Lord and bit by bit much of his kingdom will be stripped away. In Mark's gospel, Jesus meets the mute man and with the words '*Ephphatha!*'¹, his ears, clogged up for too many years, are opened. ... That we too may hear '*Ephphatha*' today, we pray ...

- *Is tusa Tobar na Trócaire* - You are the wellspring of mercy: **A Thiarna, déan trócaire.**
- *Is tusa Slí na Fírinne* - You are the way of Truth: **A Chríost, déan trócaire.**
- *Bí linn i gconaí, ós ár gcomhair amach* - Be with us always, showing us the way. **A Thiarna, déan trócaire.**

¹ Mk.7:34

Homily:

I have two weddings in my diary over the coming months! I look forward to celebrating the sacramental marriage of my nephew Brendan to Eimear on May 22nd and friends Michael & Chanipa later on July 10th.

As a bishop I don't normally have too many weddings clogging up my diary; just family generally. Baptisms and confirmations are a complete different story; sacramental moments as God whispers into the ears of the young couple at their wedding *'I'll always be there for you'*; at baptism *'this is my son, my daughter, in whom I am proud'* and at confirmation *'be sealed with the Holy Spirit'*.

The power of language, the power of articulation, the power of encounter. One word is all it takes to allow the mute man to speak "*Ephphatha*"² – *'Be opened', 'be loosened', 'be freed'*. Our gospel from St. Mark brings us a profound sense of the closeness of Jesus with people. Jesus doesn't heal from a distance. He defies the risk of infection. He is comfortable at laying hands on the man, even to putting his fingers in the man's ears and touching his tongue with spittle.

We do the very same thing during the celebration of baptism. As I pray the *Ephphatha Prayer*, the parents gently trace the sign of the Cross over the ears and mouth of their little bundle of joy.

As I look ahead to Brendan & Eimear's and Michael & Chanipa's weddings I already visualise them kneeling before the altar and God whispering into their ears to be open to the blessings and graces He will give them.

We know in life that what is said clearly is not always heard clearly. There can be misunderstandings, mixed messages, wrong vibes. Every message is filtered a thousand times as it is being received.

Jesus was an outstanding listener because of his sensitivity and that freedom of heart that enabled him to hear what was said and what was unsaid. In healing the mute man, Jesus frees him from isolation. He takes him to one side *"he took him off by himself away from the crowd"*³, so that he might in time be

² ibid

³ Mk.7:33

fully reintegrated into the community. We must go away in order to return. Healing freed the man from isolation.

Couples in their evaluation forms after their Accord Marriage Preparation Programme speak about the value of the honest conversations they've enjoyed with each other during the programme, honest conversations around love, family and faith. It's obvious that couples realise they are preparing for something sacred, special and meaningful. Enrolling on a preparation programme is an intentional decision by them to build and grow their relationship into something permanent and stable, making a conscious commitment to prepare for a life together. In many ways they are revolutionaries, not carrying arms, but arm in arm with one another.

The revolutionary nature of participants isn't anything loud or dramatic, its intentional, thought driven and demonstrates a deep sense of commitment in our time-hungry world. Couples gather with other couples to explore what sacramental marriage means in their lives. Couple therapy, a specialisation in the training of Accord's counsellors, reframes a couples problems as patterns between partners, not necessarily flaws within any one person. Couple therapy counselling replaces blame language '*who's wrong*' with '*how can we fix this together?*'. Accord and its teams across the country witness to the importance of healthy relationships for couples, which benefit families, local communities and wider society.

Mark's gospel of the healing of the mute man, demonstrates the closeness, the affection, the love Jesus has for all inviting them into a friendship with God and a new way of life. The man is healed at the margins and brought by Jesus to the centre. The communication of God's love for a couple on their wedding day takes many forms, in words used, in sacred vows exchanged, in gestures shared and most importantly in the community of family and friends who gather. Sacramental Marriage isn't an identity card that reminds us that couple were married in a church, rather its everyday being called to live in love and grow in love.

The mute man who was healed couldn't keep quiet about his healing, and we shouldn't keep quiet about the sacrament that marriage is, a sacrament that invites us to keep God central to our relationship. The more a couple grow in their relationship, agencies like Accord are there to accompany them every step of the journey. St. Valentine, pray for us.