

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let me tell you that preparing a wedding sermon is hard work. You have to dish out just the right amount of sentimentality about love and affection, combined with just the right number of embarrassing or endearing anecdotes about the intended. Well, you have mercifully spared me, those gathered, and yourselves by firmly setting this rite of Holy Marriage within the ordered services of Christ's church. By having our blessed Lord portrayed on your service folder, by the words you printed, by sending in that crucifix first thing, you indicate that you want to have first things first, and by having the bearer of God's Word come last, you show that you also want Christ Jesus last, for really that is what a Christian preacher is supposed to be, a crucifer, a man who bears forth the crucified Savior to the people. Christ, first and last, Alpha and Omega, and that also presumes that Jesus is all that's in between as well.

But you can't properly talk about Jesus without talking about gifts. And this talk about gifts allows me the delightful opportunity to get back to embarrassing you. (Don't tremble.)

Dan, I want you to look across your shoulder to your lovely bride. You don't deserve her. This is not just what her mother or friends may say under their breath, (but I don't think they do). This is what God also says. "You don't deserve her. She is my gift to you. And though I give her to you here in this life for a time, she is always truly mine, even for eternity, for I created her and in Holy Baptism and through the death and resurrection of Jesus I have purchased and won her again as My own."

And the Lord says, "Daniel Lawrence, even though you don't deserve her, I give her to you without reluctance. I delight in giving my Roseli into your arms to have and to hold from this day forward; to love

and to cherish, to comfort and to serve; to lay down your life for her in sacrificial love that mirrors the love of Christ for His bride the church.” The Lord gives her to you for you to strive with all the faculties that God has entrusted to you to keep this your dear wife, your own flesh and blood with those many children that the Lord, we pray will give you, to keep them in this faith. For this is the first calling of a husband, a spiritual calling. And you will keep them in this faith, in the forgiveness of the crucified Savior not by scolding or nagging or pleading or shaming, but by keeping the Word of the Gospel within your home in reading and prayer, by forgiving her when she sins, and all those children also. And perhaps most importantly, because you are not Christ, and because of your own sinful flesh, and because you cannot love her with the perfection of Christ, you will frequently, honestly, humbly seek from her forgiveness yourself. And she will forgive you, for she is the baptized of the crucified Savior. And you, God grant, for many years and decades will be astounded that you are forgiven and that you are able to forgive.

This is part of the amazing gift of marriage. What I am saying to you today goes for every husband or husband to be. You do not deserve your wife. She is God’s gift to you. Love her as Christ loved the church, giving Himself up for her. But remember not to get distracted by trivialities from your calling of love. Christ, whom you mirror, gave Himself up for His bride the church, not so that she would have a nice house, or nice clothing—fine, if possible—but the chief interest of Jesus is that His bride the church would cling to Him in faith for forgiveness and salvation. So it is the chief interest of the husband and father, over and above the daily duties of protecting and providing, to sacrifice in such a way that the Gospel of forgiveness in Jesus is the light, the shelter, the sustenance of your home. You can be without money; you can even be without food or roof; but you cannot be without the Savior

Jesus and His forgiveness and still have life. This is your glorious calling and wedding gift of Jesus to you as the man of this woman.

Now Rosi, you don't deserve him either. Look at how the Lord your Father in heaven has loved you to give you this man in order to mirror to you your Savior Jesus, a gift given to you with all joy and anticipation, that as you delight in your husband in many ways, you would also honor him, knowing that in honoring him, you are honoring the Savior.

This man is a gift to you, but perhaps according to God's Word it is more important that you and all wives remember that you are a gift to him. This is your calling, your astounding height of dignity. Though a world full of fools sees it as demeaning, you will ever see it as glory to submit to him as the Church submits to Christ, as St. Paul wrote.

You heard read from Genesis, "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him," a helper suitable for him. What kind of a help does a man need considering the job that the Lord has entrusted to him? Is it a small task to labor and strive to keep Christ the center of the home, which is his job? Is it some small thing to love and to sacrifice his life for you the way Jesus loved and sacrificed for the church? Will it be easy for him to crucify himself? He needs help, as the Creator understood even before sin corrupted this world. How much more since?

We talked about that word "help" or "helper"—I will make a helper suitable for him—which sounds so quaint and condescending to our contemporary ears. But that Hebrew root for "helper" or the verb "to help" is most frequently used of warriors coming to the aid of allies in battle. So your husband will be assaulted by the devil, the world and his own flesh to relinquish his calling, but you will come to his aid as a

warrior in your prayers, in your encouragement, in your correction, and in the submission and honor by which you demonstrate your love to him.

Even more significantly the LORD Himself is not ashamed to be called by that very same Hebrew root, the help of His people, especially in the psalms, as you yourselves prayed today in the opening versicles of this office:

Make haste, O God, to deliver me.

Make haste to *help* me, O Lord (Ps. 70:1)

Over and over again in the psalms, the very same word, “help” used to describe Eve and all women is a divine name and work befitting God Himself:

**Psalm 30:10** O LORD, be my helper!"

**Psalm 33:20** Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our *help* and our shield.

**Psalm 54:4** Behold, God is my *helper*; the Lord is the upholder of my life.

**Psalm 86:17** You, LORD, have *helped* me and comforted me.

**Psalm 124:8** Our *help* is in the name of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.

And there are many, many more I could cite.

Dare I say that the wife, the Helpmeet, stands beside her husband as God’s own strong, hand of help in disguise, or behind a mask, as Martin Luther put it. This is the Savior’s wedding gift to you: that you may be the help of your husband, mirroring the Lord who is the help of His people, especially by recalling him to the One who redeemed Him by His death, for there will be many times when he will be distracted and drawn away from the Lord who is first and last.

Dan, Rosi, you don't deserve each other, but God has given you to one another, and He has given you each a hard but delightful, ancient and honorable calling. But as we began with Jesus, and as Jesus has been the Great Giver throughout all that has been said, we also we end with Jesus.

The greatest gift that Christ gives you, longer than “until death do us part”—He gives you Himself in the Word preached, in the Water of Baptism, in His true body and blood placed into your mouths. He richly and daily forgives you all your sins. How is it possible that she will go on forgiving you? How is it possible that you will go on forgiving her? Because Christ's forgiveness has been lavished upon you.

Cling to Jesus the crucified, the risen, the Alpha the Omega and all that runs in between. So God grant His dear Son to us all. Amen.