



Annual Celebration of Married Life
at Saint Columba's, Chester 13th June 2026

As we give thanks for many centuries of married life in all the anniversaries celebrated today (more than two thousand years!), we do so in year when we keep the 175th anniversary of Shrewsbury Diocese. An anniversary which leads us to reflect today on the place which marriage and family life has held in all the life and witness of this Diocese.

For marriage is no merely human institution, rather, as the Gospel reminds us, marriage has been received from the hand of the Creator "*from the beginning*"ⁱ as God created man and woman; and Christ Himself came to restore and raise marriage to the high dignity of a Sacrament. It is this vision of married life and love which countless couples have strived to live and the Church, often embattled in the witness of her teaching, has always sought to defend against everything that diminishes or discards God's plan and purpose in marriage.

If marriage was in some eras viewed as merely conventional, the Church insisted it was much more: a Divine vocation, demanding the free consent and the equal dignity of man and woman. When marriage was in danger of being reduced to merely a legal contract, the Church declared with Saint Paul that marriage between the Baptised is a great Sacramentⁱⁱ, "*an efficacious sign of Christ's presence*" among usⁱⁱⁱ for the salvation of the couple and for the highest good of family and society.

In more recent times when the faithfulness of the promises of marriage was called into question, the Church defended the unbreakable fidelity on which marriage and family is established. When 'anti-life' mentalities denied even openness to the gift of new life, the Church taught at the Second Vatican Council that "*by its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of children, and it is in them it finds its crowning glory*"^{iv}.

When politicians sought to re-define the identity of marriage, the Church declared the plan of the Creator from the beginning as "*written in the very nature of man and woman*"^v. When marriage was reduced in the minds of many to a 'life-style choice', the Church taught anew that the faithful, enduring love of man and woman is the

foundation of the family and so of human society. For in Saint John Paul II's immortal words: *"the future of humanity passes by way of the family."*

The Church has constantly sought to pass on in all her teaching the beautiful truth about marriage in every era whether this has been welcome or unwelcome. Yet, it is married couples themselves who have visibly taught and shared this great truth with each successive generation by their own joyful witness, generous sacrifices and faithful perseverance, making each couple "the first teachers of the faith" about marriage in every home, family and community.

As we see a new generation of young adults, often coming from no religious background, finding their way year after year to faith and baptism in the Catholic Church, we have need to share with these new converts (and we are all converts!) this same wonderful truth. Marriage as it is received as a gift from the Creator and restored by grace and raised by Christ Himself. In this anniversary year which marks a milestone in your own married lives as in the life and witness of this Shrewsbury Diocese, let us pray that the vocation of marriage may be rediscovered in all its truth and beauty by every generation to come.

ⁱ Cf. Mk. 10: 6-9

ⁱⁱ Cf. Eph. 5: 25,32

ⁱⁱⁱ Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 1613

^{iv} Gaudium et Spes No. 48

^v Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 1603