

Good afternoon...I'm Deacon Jack Miller, a permanent deacon at St. Teresa of Avila Parish where Brian and his family are members. I'd like to thank Pastor Susan Schwartz, Brian and Sam for inviting me and welcoming me to Sam and her family's spiritual home...and for the opportunity to give this homily.

I'd like to begin by sharing a story about Harold and Margaret, two friends I met at St. Teresa when I was first assigned there. Harold and Margaret met nearly 35 years ago. It was love at first site. They married in 1981, but never had any children...possibly because they were each 43 years-old when they met.

Over time, I noticed that the couple regularly attended our Saturday evening Mass. What I didn't know until Harold died was that they also attended a local Presbyterian Church every Sunday. It turned out Harold was Catholic; Margaret, Presbyterian...and for 34 years...that was their weekend routine.

As I got to know them better, I learned that each suffered from serious health issues, yet each was always there for the other...because their love for each other started with their love for Jesus.

They never let their religion interfere with their faith. They grew in their relationship because each understood that the person they loved was who he or she was because of his or her relationship with Jesus...a relationship **cultivated** by their respective faith traditions.

So religion didn't divide them...Jesus united them...in good times and bad...for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. Their focus on Jesus is what got them through their rough times, which the Franciscan contemplative Richard Rohr calls *necessary suffering*.

Necessary suffering is the labor that precedes delivery; the practice needed to win a US Open; the work that leads to a promotion...the crucifixion that preceded the Resurrection. It's a falling that **demands** rising. It's what Sam and Brian got me thinking about when they told me [their words]: *We met and FELL in love at Robert Morris University.*

Did we ever think about what it means to FALL in love? Isn't "falling" a bad thing? Not when the word refers to two people sacrificing what one needs for the need of the other. It's what Richard Rohr refers to as ***Falling Upward***.

It's falling the way Jesus fell for us: no compromises, no shortcuts, no excuses; just a love that guarantees that when there **IS** suffering associated with a fall, there is an even greater JOY associated with two people helping each other up from that fall. It's what Aunt Dorothy proclaimed in our reading from Ecclesiastes: "*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil...for if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.*"

Our culture defines marriage as a **contract** between two people who begin as roommates, develop into teammates and ultimately...formally agree to stay together until one or both decide that the falls are too much to bear.

But in our Gospel reading, Mark tells us that marriage is a **covenant** between a man and a woman who **commit** to begin and end, not as teammates or roommates, but soul mates...and whose roles are to lift each other after every fall, ultimately falling upward, closer to God until finally, each meets Him.

Aunt Cindy's proclamation from First Corinthians provided the way to achieve that objective:

Love each other as Christ loved us, because without love...you are nothing. That is the Truth. So rejoice with that truth...and you can bear all suffering; believe all things; hope all things; endure all things...because love never ends.

As someone celebrating a 40th wedding anniversary tomorrow, I can attest to the truth of what I've shared. So Brian and Sam, to help you avoid unnecessary falls and suffering...let me leave you with my top-10 list for a successful marriage:

1. Like Harold and Margaret, keep Jesus at the center of your relationship;
2. Treat every day together as a blessing from God;
3. Never let a day pass without saying *I love you* to each other;
4. Pray together, because the family that prays together stays together;
5. Live the Gospel, because faith without works is dead;
6. Never go to bed angry;
7. Accept children lovingly from God;
8. You can never outdo God's generosity...try anyway;
9. You never know as much as you think you know; and
10. Church with a small "c" is only a **building**...Church with a capital "C" is the **community** where two or more gather in His name, SO GATHER TOGETHER IN HIS NAME...AND IF POSSIBLE, TWICE A WEEKEND!

You have come to this church with a small "c" in the Church with a capital "C" to declare before God your intention to give yourselves completely to one another as Jesus gave Himself completely to us to atone for our sins.

You do this knowing there will be falls, but trusting that when they come, God will help you lift each other up.

We stand ready to assist you on your journey and pray that like Harold and Margaret...you never forget who you are...always remember how you got there... and forever keep Jesus at the center of your relationship.

May God grant you many years.

Old Testament Reading – Aunt Dorothy, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil...for if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

New Testament Reading – Aunt Cindy 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Gospel Reading Mark 10:6-9

But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female. ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together...let not man separate.”