

14th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

July 3, 2016—Their names are MATTHEW and SHANNON. On Friday, I was privileged to witness their wedding vows at Saint Mary's Church in Bristol. They are quite a couple. They met during their college years as engineering students at Northeastern University. They were very active in the Catholic community on campus and this wedding Mass was the focus of their planning for the past several months.

Their Catholic faith, fostered throughout their lives by their good parents, is very important to them and their Mass on Friday afternoon made that very clear. In fact, they had an interesting message printed on the first page of the wedding program for their many guests. It read like this:

"Welcome to our unplugged wedding. We are honored that you are here to share our special day. It means a great deal to us that you are witnesses to our marriage vows. We really want to see your faces not your devices. We respectfully ask that everyone leave all cell phones and cameras off during the ceremony. The greatest gift you can give to us is just being in the moment with us. We promise to share with you the beautiful pictures that our amazing photographer, Karen, will be taking today. So we encourage you to listen, pray and sing."

My friends, I was happy to report to the bride and groom, who were facing the altar the entire time, that right to the end of the Mass their guests did precisely what they had been asked—not a cell phone or camera was seen.

It's a great idea and coming from a bride and groom an even better example of putting faith first, keeping our focus on the Almighty and making sure that our lives are lived for Him. But, we must ask, where did newlyweds Shannon and Matt get this idea? What inspired them in their message, their Mass and their faith? Well, the answer was found in the gospel reading that they had chosen for their wedding day. From the Gospel of Saint Matthew:

"Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like the wise man who built his house on rock, the rain fell the floods came and buffeted the house, but it did not collapse, it had been set solidly on rock."

My friends, how powerful this message was on Friday. As the historic and picturesque town of Bristol completed the enormous preparations for its long list of events all meant to celebrate our national pride—and especially the longest-running 4th of July parade in the nation that primarily celebrates our INDEPENDENCE—a young couple climbed St. Mary's Church steps and knelt before the altar of God to proclaim their DEPENDENCE on Him!

But in reality it is not a contrast at all. In fact, historians ALL agree that in every word and phrase of that great document of INDEPENDENCE is the clear and spoken belief of a young nation declaring its DEPENDENCE on Almighty God. It is to HIM that those first statesmen deferred and to Him that they

gave their ultimate allegiance. In fact, giving Him credit for all the goodness and opportunity that was now theirs. Those early years were resplendent with leaders like General George Washington, who would become our first president, Thomas Jefferson and John Hancock, who each left us inspiring words as reminders that America and her citizens stand tallest when she is on her knees in prayer. That the ROCK of FAITH and GOODNESS is what the nation was built on and continues stand upon firmly.

The Almighty was granted that rightful place on those very first days by the intent, words and foresight of our founders and now the task is ours to be certain He stays with us for the many days and years in our future.

And just to make it all very real and tell us it still can be done, in a 21st century way, He sends us a young and beautiful couple madly in love to grant us the finest INDEPENDENCE DAY homily that can be preached: that God comes first and is above all. And, THAT is the reason we can sing and we can pray this weekend and every day. May He continue to bless America, the land that we love.

God love you.