

Speech by Bishop Gunnar Stålsett

Dear Haakon and Dear Mette-Marit

"So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor 13,13).

Today these beautiful words from the Bible are yours. Rarely have they rung out so strongly! They point the way for the life you will live together - a life borne up by faith, hope and love.

The path you have chosen has not been without thorns. But love has prevailed. Today it is being confirmed for all the world to see: love is the greatest of all, greater even than faith or hope. You have given courage to many who long for a love that 'bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things,' as the Apostle Paul says. You believe in each other as you embark on the future with confidence. You are showing us the creative power of love.

The Cathedral choir has greeted you with the Bible's powerful tribute to love: 'for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave.' Passion is a part of life. It can tear down and build up. And passion can also be divine - a physical experience of eternity. It is a gift from God, who on the sixth day made man in His own image. Therefore I say to you, keep alive the passion that unites and renews.

God's word reminds us that love and fidelity seek each other out. Love does not say, 'I will love you until tomorrow', or 'until next year', but 'I will love you for the rest of my life'. The vow to love and honour one another is thus a part of love. Such a promise to God and to the whole world to be faithful for better or for worse says something about how vulnerable love is. This is why you are standing before God's altar today.

He who is born to be king knows the meaning of destiny. A crown prince has a demanding legacy. Only love can transform destiny into a vocation. Only love can transform duty into a gift. Together with the woman you love, by your side, Crown Prince Haakon, you will find your responsibility easier to bear. And, like your great-grandfather, your grandfather and your father, as you encounter the people's love, you will also gain the strength to one day bear the great responsibility it is to be Norway's king.

God moves in mysterious ways. Love's ways are wondrous. Mette-Marit, you show courage and faith in saying yes to an unknown future. You are beginning a new chapter, with the pages still unwritten. You do this with dignity. Today you are better equipped to understand others, young and old, who are in pain. Jesus says, 'he who is forgiven little, loves little' (Luke 7, 47).

Your love for your son shows both tenderness and determination. As a single mother you have set an example in the way you have cared for your child. Your love for your son has shown tenderness and determination. The Prophet Isaiah compares God's love to a mother's love when he says, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands' (Isaiah 49, 15f). You have not forgotten, you will not forget. Nor will you be forgotten by God.

Haakon and Mette-Marit, the Bible says that you shall become one. This does not mean obliterating your true selves. Marriage is a lifelong exercise in turning towards one another. This means being able to meet each other's eyes - as you have already shown us so eloquently. It means taking care of the other by taking care of yourself.

'Be each other's closest friends,' as Kofi Annan recently said to you, and as he asked me to remind you today. When a marriage is characterized by friendship it is not threatening but safe to 'be subject to one another', as the Bible says.

Love and marriage are not merely a private matter. Lifelong, binding love is part of the public sphere. This is very clear today, when you two take your marriage vows. Relating to two families is enough for most people. You have to relate to a whole nation, a nation with many strong opinions. Rejoice that so many people are offering you their prayers and good wishes! Rejoice that so many are waiting for you in villages and towns all over Norway!

You yourselves have chosen hymns and texts that speak of truth, justice and brotherly love. These are values that the Church, too, wants to keep alive.

For what is the Church's task if not to give people courage and hope, wherever they are in the world? What is the Church's vocation if not to show that there is a heaven above each individual life? This is also the main reason why we are here in the Cathedral today. We are here to pray for you, and to pray with you.

We pray that you will always be able to live together in love. We pray for the home you will build together. We pray for the vocation that you will be sharing. We pray that you will help each other towards eternal life. From God's house the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ shall shine upon you, upon Marius, upon all those you carry in your hearts.

This is the mystery, this is the secret of faith, what the Bible calls grace: that we may live with God's blessing. It encompasses everything, our whole life, from birth to death. Grace is what holds our lives together. Even our choices can be borne up by God's grace - if only we dare.

This is what the old general in Karen Blixen's tale *Babette's Feast* has understood when he thanks her for the meal:

"Man, my friends, is frail and foolish.. in our human foolishness and short-sightedness we imagine divine grace to be finite. For this reason we tremble - we tremble before making our choice in life and after having made it, again tremble in fear of having chosen wrong. But the moment comes when our eyes are opened, and we see and realize that grace is infinite. Grace, my friends, demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it in gratitude.. See! That which we have chosen is given us."

Haakon and Mette-Marit, when our eyes are opened we understand that God's grace is infinite. This is the moment you have waited for with confidence. This is the moment you can acknowledge with gratitude.

Haakon, she whom you have chosen is offered you as a gift.
Mette-Marit, he whom you have chosen is given you.

Amen.