

06 Oct 2024 – 27th Sunday (Year B)

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(1) Genesis 2:18-24

God intends man and woman to become one flesh

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.”

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Responsorial: from Psalm 128

R./: May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives

O blessed are those who fear the Lord
and walk in his ways!
by the labour of your hands you shall eat.
You will be happy and prosper. *R./*

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
in the heart of your house;
your children like shoots of the olive,
around your table. *R./*

Indeed thus shall be blessed
the man who fears the Lord.
May the Lord bless you from
Zion in a happy Jerusalem
all the days of your life! *(R./)*

(2) Hebrews 2:9-11

Jesus became fully our brother and a saviour for all

We see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one

Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

Gospel: Mark 10:2-16

(or shorter version: Mark 10:2-12, omitting the text in italics)

“What God has joined together” and receiving the kingdom of God as a little child

Some Pharisees came, and to test Jesus they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery too.”

People were bringing little children to him so that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.



Our Catholic Church, about relationships

The discussion of relationships occupies a huge space in our world today. It has been well said that when rituals are changing, then some large shift is taking place in society and it is more than evident that the rituals around marriage are changing fast. The readings provide a chance to talk about all this, in the context of mercy and compassion. (The recent changes initiated by Pope Francis regarding canonical annulments may be of interest.) The wider context of many different kinds of relationships may help us here. It is not just about marriage. Kieran O'Mahony

Life Together

Many would see today's gospel as impracticable for our times. How can a couple be expected to stay together for possibly 50 years, given today's longevity? But it is important to distinguish between the ideal of marital fidelity, and how that law is applied in our Church. Sometimes in the past the law about marriage was harshly and insensitively preached. The sad truth is that not all marriages work out well. Some marry in haste, and some may not

have what it takes to live in a lifelong relationship. But following Jesus we at least support the ideal he laid down: that marriage is meant to last for a lifetime.

On their wedding day, a couple set out on a journey, which hopefully will lead them into a deeper love and partnership with the passing years. Possibly their early love for each other has a quality of *infatuation*, or *feeling in love*, and our emotions, while good and useful, are largely outside our control. True, lasting love is more based on *decision* than emotion. While I cannot control my emotions, I can renew a decision each and every day.

Our Catholic Church sees marriage as a covenant between a woman and a man, who enter a partnership of their whole lives. It is a life-project, a vocation for which they receive the grace of a special sacrament to make it viable. For a marriage to succeed requires a constant effort of goodwill, to cooperate with the grace of God. The couple should foster a relationship that is dynamic, never static; some say that if it is not moving forward, it is going backwards. Living in married love with another means dying to self in many little ways, because love is a kind of laying down a life for one's friend. Our faith says that it is only by dying to self that we are capable of giving life to others, which carries within it Christ's promise of eternal life.

Keeping marriage alive

While modern society makes us tolerant of divorce following marital breakdown, in today's Gospel Christ invites us to reflect on

the ideal of permanence of marriage and on the value of lifelong commitment. His words on the indissolubility of marriage set an ideal that is especially difficult for our times, when we are so much influenced by a libertarian ideology that prizes *personal fulfilment* above all else.

Marriage is built on basic, life-giving human instincts and can survive even in a time of radical social change. Families who have kept fidelity over the years demonstrate that love *can* weather the storms which even the best of relationships cannot always avoid. But the instability of family life today, and the large number of marital separations, needs to be prayed about. At the same time, as pope Francis has said so warmly, our Church must show due regard for people who are in new unions after their first has broken up, for whatever reason. It is not enough just to propose an ideal of marriage based on fidelity; the problems of tense marriage relationships are not solved by constant preaching, no matter how well-meant. Conscious of this, the Church has agencies to help couples to prepare for marriage, and later help them cope with the conflicts that threaten their perseverance. (Examples of the kind of marriage-counselling available locally could feature in today's homily.)

There are many reasons why a marriage might fail. Possibly the parties were not emotionally mature at the time they married, nor fully free in giving their marriage consent. People who never thought of the deeper, spiritual meaning of marriage, can come to feel that their marriage was an unfortunate mistake.. In helping to prepare couples for marriage, trying to foster their growth in married love, and even when declaring certain marriages to be null and void, those involved must try to combine their ideal of marriage with an appreciation of love between the sexes and with

understanding and compassion for those today who find difficulty in living up to the challenges of Christian marriage .

We pray for the Synod of Bishops now taking place in Rome, that they may be open to new insights on how to care for marriage and the family today, and advise the Pope on what steps the Church can and should take, to be a more welcoming place for those whose marriages have proved unsustainable, but who wish to continue as faithful friends of Christ.

The indispensable partner

According to Genesis 2, God created man from the earth and God created woman from the side of man. This account has often been misinterpreted to suggest the subordination of woman to man. The translation ‘helpmate’ is not an accurate translation of the Hebrew word. Something like ‘indispensible partner’ would be better. The text suggests that the woman is to stand alongside the man as his equal. She corresponds to him exactly, as the man affirms, ‘bone of my bones’, ‘flesh of my flesh.’ But if the man names the animals, suggesting a certain authority over them, he simply recognises the name of the woman as *ish-shah*, the female version of himself. The primary relationship between the man and the woman is adult to adult. The text proclaims that from the beginning God intended men and women to interact with mutuality and partnership. According to our first reading that mutuality between a man and a woman finds its fullest expression in marriage, a ‘man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body.’

In today's gospel, Jesus turns to this text from the Book of Genesis when he is put on the spot by some Pharisees regarding the question of divorce. As the Pharisees would have known, the Jewish Law permitted a form of divorce. According to the Book of Deuteronomy, a man who becomes displeased with his wife because he finds in her something objectionably could write her a bill of divorce, hand it to her and dismiss her from his house. There was no provision in Jewish law for a woman to divorce her husband. It was a law which left women vulnerable. In reply to the Pharisees Jesus declares that what the law allows is not what actually what God wills. God's purpose for marriage, according to Jesus, is to be found in those opening chapters of the book of Genesis. Whereas the Pharisees ask Jesus about divorce, in his reply Jesus places the focus on marriage. His vision of marriage is of a profound union between a man and a woman, a communion of faithful love. It is no coincidence that immediately after the passage in which Jesus speaks of marriage, Mark in his gospel gives us a story about children, about parents bringing children to Jesus for him to bless them. Marriage between a man and a woman is a tried and tested way in which children can grow up to be loved, as well as being given stability and security. No other setting has been proven better for the nourishing and flourishing of children. If society cares about children, it will channel financial and professional resources into supporting marriage, understood as a communion of faithful love between a man and a woman, the fullest expression in human form of the communion of love between the Lord and us.

We know from experience that that not all marriages reflect the ideal Jesus sets up in today's gospel. Many of us will have relatives whose marriages have not lasted. The gospels are clear that although Jesus has a vision for human relationships, including

within marriage, he did not condemn those who feel short of that vision. All of us, married or single, are called to love one another as the Lord has loved us, and we all fail in our response to that call. It is in those moments of weakness and failure that the second part of today's gospel has most to say to us, 'anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will not enter it.' We stand before the Lord with a child-like heart, in our weakness and vulnerability, open and receptive to the great gift of the Lord's love that is given to us unconditionally. It is that gift which empowers us to keep reaching towards the goal, the ideal, the Jesus puts before us all.