

Twenty Seventh Sunday of the Year October 04, 2015

Readings: Genesis 2:18-24; Hebrews 2:9-11; Mark 10:2-16

Christianity is a person-centered religion as Jesus is the person around whom the Christian faith is built. Christ, the Son of God, the Word made flesh, stands at the center of our Christian faith and guides the peoples and families. The Church founded by Jesus is more than an earthly society, more than a mere product of history; it is an extension of this same Incarnation. For us, the life in the Spirit can never be disembodied. Redeemed believers are to live in newness of life, in a world of persons. We are called to be persons living in the world, though not of the world. Therefore the prayer, May your will be done on earth, is the Christian prayer presenting the characteristics of all Christians. The Church which is the body of Christ always aims to identify herself with the whole of humanity. Jesus said that the world would know that we are his disciples by the love that we have for one another. Jesus says where two or three gather in his name he is present there among them. St Paul says that love is the perfect bond of unity. Today's readings tell us of the sacredness of married life. In the first reading God blesses man and woman whom he created. In their love for each other in marriage the two become one. In the Gospel we have the teaching of Jesus about divorce and remarriage. He blesses the little children with the message that they symbolize those fit to enter the kingdom of God. In the second reading we hear that the Son of God came to the earth and identified with us. We are his brothers and sisters. He suffered and died for us so that we may be saved.

One significant theme in the creation account is God's gracious love for humanity. Out of love for them God created the world, bestowed on them the privilege of enjoying the Garden of Eden, and gave them the distinct honor of walking with God in the Garden. In the first reading of today God offers them yet another gift of love. As the reading begins God announces that it is not good for man to be alone. This is the first time God declares something associated with creation to be not good. Such an appraisal gives all the more emphasis to the wonderful gift of finding a partner to love. This appraisal also sets in motion the process that concludes with the presentation of Eve to Adam. The reader knows that only woman will perfectly complement man, giving special attention to the wonderful gift of married love. When God presents the woman to him, the man calls her by a name, revealing by the way it sounds that she is indeed the perfect partner. This was lacking in the names given to the animals. The Hebrew words for man and woman are similar. The reading concludes with an affirmation of the union between man and woman repeated in every generation. God says they will leave all

and cling to each other. In marriage, the man and the woman become one. They belong to each other.

In today's Second Reading, we heard that for a little while Jesus was made lower than the angels so he may be crowned with glory and honor. Up to this point, the Letter to the Hebrews has stressed the superiority of Jesus to the angels. Jesus was divine, the Son of God. He also suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. Christ suffered and died for us human persons. He did all this to bring us to glory, so we may obtain our salvation through him. In Christ, we are sanctified by the grace of the heavenly Father and the power of the Holy Spirit. Our sanctification unites us with our Sanctifier, Jesus Christ. Our sanctification entitles us to be called brothers and sisters of Christ. Because Jesus was also human, he could identify with us. He took our human nature and thus we are of the same human stock as he, and so he can call us his brothers and sisters. By the grace of God he tasted death for us so that we might be saved. But this is only possible if we live by the Law, the Divine Law of love and holiness so the grace of God may continuously shine on us as we persevere in our pilgrimage on earth towards the eternal Kingdom that awaits those who will qualify to be adopted as the children of God. Christ was the leader, the first to rise from the dead. Thus he made possible our resurrection to eternal life.

The Gospel of today gives us the teachings of Jesus on marriage and divorce and an attitude towards children. In the larger context however, is his teaching on the meaning of discipleship. Jesus had already redefined the meaning of family when he told the people that those who do the will of God are the members of his family. The family is a strong unit that contains God's presence. With this he set forth an ideal of detachment as necessary for discipleship. Following Jesus brought with it family pressures that could easily divide members. There were also financial and social matters to be concerned with. So the question comes now about the strength of marriage and divorce. The Scribes and Pharisees question how the teaching of Torah finds a place in the teaching of Jesus to the disciples. Mark clearly tells us that this group wanted to test Jesus about his stand on the matter. They must have heard that Jesus did not approve divorce among the Jews and they wanted to hear him contradicting Moses and in that way they could accuse him of not accepting the Laws. This also meant that they already know the answer to their question. They were looking for a response from Jesus in order to trap him through his teaching. Jesus, who is very Goodness, is once again attacked by Pharisees, who seek to make him say something reprehensible in order to discredit him in the eyes of the multitude that believes in him, a multitude that does not cease growing in numbers. Now it is on the question of divorce that the Pharisees attack Jesus. Jesus

stresses the importance of marriage because in marriage, man and woman become one. They belong to each other. The union between a man and a woman in the Sacrament of Marriage is compared to the union between Christ and the Church.

Jesus concedes that Moses did indeed permit divorce and remarriage with a written bill of divorce. Divorce was permitted by Jewish law and it could be done simply by a husband delivering a certificate declaring his intention to divorce his wife, giving freedom to both to remarry. However, he considers that concession was given due to the distorted nature of humankind and not God's intention at creation. Jesus therefore reaffirms God's original intent by absolutely forbidding divorce and remarriage. The point here is more on the authority of Jesus to make this declaration than the issue of divorce. It would have been shocking to hear Jesus say that a man or a woman could commit adultery against each other by this act. Jesus then was very strong in his teaching on divorce. He tells the Pharisees that whoever divorces his wife and marries commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman, commits adultery. These strong words of Jesus sound like a great judgment upon a civilization such as ours, where there is one divorce for every two marriages and many consequent re-marriages after such divorces. It is extremely important that the strength of the family unity is maintained. What unites families today is primarily the saving work of Christ. In his teaching Jesus insisted on the original intention of the Creator who willed that marriage be indissoluble. Between the baptized, "a ratified and consummated marriage cannot be dissolved by any human power or for any reason other than death."

Our Christian doctrine tells us that because marriage is a union made by God, it is unbreakable. The Church teaches that the man and woman, who commit the rest of their lives to each other, truly become one. This is the way God intended marriage, and it is important to remember that marriage was instituted by God, not by man. When reflecting on divorce, you must ask yourself whose rules you are playing by when you agree to marry. One of the great tragedies in our modern culture is that the family is under attack from all sides. Countless movies, television shows and song lyrics depict single-parent families or do not include the parents at all. Commitment is replaced by a distorted notion of love. After all, they say, you only live once and you deserve to be happy. Despite the reason for any divorce, the impact is almost always traumatic on all parties involved, especially children. He tells them that He who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one". So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.' This is how Jesus speaks of the unity in the family as it is the creative plan of God and no one can

break this plan of his. By joining them together God ratifies the mutual love of persons. Their sexual union serves as a pledge of exclusive fidelity to each other.

Marriage has been of interest and importance to everybody. With this teaching Jesus emphasizes the greatness of marriage. No reality is greater than this! For God wanted the union of marriage to be the unique mode of expression in which is realized the spiritual, mystical, union between Christ and his Church: Christ is truly the Husband of the Church, and the Church is truly the Wife of Christ! God instituted marriage at the time of the creation of man and woman, for in the first man he already saw Christ and in the first woman he already saw the Church, and in particular Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the perfect model of the entire Church. Thus when a man and a woman unite themselves to each other through marriage, a new body is formed, a body which, normally, will be concretized one day by the birth of one or more children. This new body, this unique union between a man and a woman, can never be divided or broken. For, in reality, this new body forms part of the spiritual and mystical union that God wants to realize with all the men and women whom he created in his love. To want to break the union between a man and a woman, would this not almost like want to divide in two the body of their child. Jesus gives importance to the role of a woman as per the Roman law but the Jews did not give any special place to women. In contrast with the prevailing culture; Jesus presents man and woman as having equal rights. He also presents marriage as essentially a permanent relationship.

Immediately after the discussion on divorce, there is a passage where Jesus speaks about children – the fruit of marriage. Let them come to me, Jesus says, because kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Parents should not stand in way of their children finding God; on the contrary, they should rather show the way. In a difficult family where there is no love and lack of union, there are the children, who become the real victims. Immediately after the episode of weighty discussion Jesus had returned home and the parents were seeking the Teacher to touch and bless their children. The disciples may have felt Jesus was tired and wanted rest before he begins another ministry. They did not think it right to trouble their master at this point. Jesus did not like the interference of the disciples in this matter and blocking the children from coming to him. He was happy to receive the children, talk to them, bless them and even play with them. He was indeed happy with them and tells them that that they were truly innocent and fit members of the Kingdom of God. He tells them that whoever wants to be true member of the Kingdom of heaven must be like the little child, innocent, humble, trusting the other with its total reliance on God. Just as the children rely on their parents, they ought to rely on God for everything as they are first and foremost God's children. In today's

world we see the exploitation of children by adults we realize how with delicacy Jesus protects them and cares for them even by sending an angel for them.

The Gospel today sees marriage not being lived in isolation but in the context of a loving and supportive community. A wedding, the sacrament of marriage, usually takes place among relatives and friends. They not only are there to witness the marriage, to respect a now exclusive relationship but also to help foster it, protect it, nurture it. Undoubtedly divorce is a very painful experience for a married couple. Although permanent commitments are less popular nowadays, most people do not enter marriage on a trial basis. Facing the threat of divorce is an experience no one wants to go through. It is a humiliating admission of failure in a venture which seemed so full of promise on the wedding day. Two people who once seemed so sure of each other have now to admit they can no longer live at the level of union they expected. At the same time the children, who are the real victims and can at times be the victims of divorce. Whatever the case, it is important for the Church to be always mindful of the healing compassion of Jesus who came to save and not to condemn. It remembers the words of Jesus that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. As we listen and contemplate his word, let us like children have confidence in that other who calls on us, that other who mysteriously forms part of our body... Like children, let us have confidence in the Spirit of God, who watched over the creation of man and woman, and let us allow ourselves to be led by this Spirit, who unites all the members of the Mystical Body of Christ in order to make us children of Mary.

It was a busy morning, about 8:30, when an elderly gentleman in his 80's arrived at the clinic to have stitches removed from his thumb. He said he was in a hurry as he had an appointment at 9:00 am. The nurse in attendance asked him to take his seat and since she was free she took time to evaluate his wound. The medico would not be free for another hour and the man was constantly checking his watch. On exam, it was well healed, so she talked to one of the doctors, got the needed supplies to remove his sutures and redress his wound. While taking care of his wound, she asked him if he had another doctor's appointment that morning, as he was in such a hurry. The gentleman just said that he needed to go to the nursing home to eat breakfast with his wife. While inquiring he told her that she had been there for a while and that she was a victim of Alzheimer's disease. The nurse asked if she would be upset if he was a bit late. He replied that she no longer knew who he was, that she had not recognized him in five years now. The nurse was surprised and asked him why he was in a hurry. He smiled as he patted her hand and said, 'She doesn't know me, but I still know who she is.' The nurse had to hold back tears as

he left, and thought, 'That is the kind of love I want in my life.' True love is neither physical, nor romantic. True love is an acceptance of all that is, has been, will be, and will not be.

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