

**Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time B - *What God has united, man must not divide.***  
October 03, 2021.

Time really flies. Now we are in October. For us Catholic, the month of October is traditionally dedicated to the Rosary, the ancient, simple, but powerful prayer that keeps us close to Mary and her smile. Pray the Rosary daily to ask Holy Mary to pray for us to grow in faith, hope and love in time of sadness, depression, anxiety and suffering.

**The Church's liturgy is our great teacher. As weeks pass, it reviews the great issues of our existence, and the Word of God points the way forward.** In the past few weeks, it talks about discipleship. This Sunday's gospel reading (Mark 10:2-16) has words that are likely to make some of us feel uncomfortable. ***Jesus is ruling out divorce. In today's world, marriages are in crisis, and the break-up of families leaves many young people seriously deprived in their formative years. Without the guidance of Christ we would be at a loss to find the truth that should guide us.*** In today's reading from Mark, Jesus is asked whether divorce was permissible. In the time of Jesus, although divorce was permitted (Deuteronomy 24: 1-4) the proper grounds for divorce were debated. Jesus bypasses this debate, and speaks of **what marriage is in the plan of the Creator.** Citing today's first reading from Genesis (2:18-24), he makes the startling assertion that true marriage is more than an arrangement entered into by two human persons; it involves God ' ***–What God has united, man must not divide .***

In the Jewish tradition, salvation begins with the wedding of Adam and Eve, when the bride is created from the flesh of the bridegroom. Since then, all of salvation history has been the unfolding of God's covenantal relationship with his people. In the letter to the Ephesians, **St. Paul compares the marriage of husband and wife to the union of Christ and the Church. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"** (Ephesians 5:22-33). As a Jewish Christian, Paul understood that the fundamental shape of salvation history as a whole is nuptial. **At the start of John's Gospel, Jesus turns water into wine at a Jewish wedding feast, revealing his identity as the bridegroom, the Messiah.** In predicting his own passion, Jesus also frames his death in the context of a wedding day (see Matthew 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35). But Jesus is no ordinary bridegroom and his marriage is no ordinary marriage. **His wedding feast is the Last Supper, and the consummation of his marriage happens on the cross.**

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, it also reiterates Christ's identity as the bridegroom, connecting the way Christ gave himself on the cross and the way a husband and wife give themselves to one another. **"It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves and taking up their crosses that spouses will be able to 'receive 'the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ. This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life"** (CCC, 1615). **Viewing Christian marriage through the lens of the cross reminds us how suffering and love are bound up together: the more willingly we suffer on another's behalf, the more we love. A married couple should see their relationship as an icon of the Holy Trinity—and more to it, a means by which the Trinitarian love bursts forth into the world. The two partners have a mission before God. St. Paul saw that Christian marriage had a precisely Christian purpose: to symbolize the love of Christ and the Church.** As a husband loves his wife (and as she loves him), so does Christ love the Church and the Church (at least ideally) loves him. **What does Christ's love for his Church look like? Well, it's a deeply joyful reality, for it is the sharing of the divine life**

Having said all these, let's go back to the readings of this Sunday. In the first reading (Genesis 2:18-24) we heard about how **God created man and woman to help and to care for each other. And that their relationship should be primary and permanent. This is the ideal relationship created by God for us. And when we prepare for commitment to another person we long for the reality of this ideal.** It is likely that anyone who comes to church for marriage preparation knows this and intends it to be so. But in the Gospel (Mark 10:2-16), we hear the echoes of the same story in the context of the Pharisees questioning Jesus about divorce. In this particular incidence, they are trying to catch Jesus about his knowledge of the law of Moses. They ask if it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. **Jesus tells them that Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal to divorce her because of the hardness of men's hearts. They had been treating their wives as a possession which they had grown tired of and did not even care if she was regarded as someone fit to be stoned. Moses' law raised the status of women a notch.**

**But Jesus says that God made man and woman in the beginning of creation. And in the relationship of husband and wife, they shall leave mother and father and be joined as one flesh.** Now, to be one flesh is clearly a condition of equal value for both the woman and the man. **They are to be mutually responsible in caring for each other. Here the status of men and women is equally valuable and so Jesus is raising the status of women even more** and telling the Pharisees that they must exceed the letter of the law. God said in creation that it is not good for a person to live alone. When one lives alone there is no one to share one's thoughts and feelings. We know that it is better to have someone who cares for us deeply. Yet, **when two people are caught in a broken relationship it is painful.** There is still the loneliness. There may be abusive behaviour to their partner and their children. There may be abusive action toward the self. There is no easy way to make things right. It is in the sharing of human companionship that this mysterious depth in the human person can be filled. The Creator provides for Adam the perfect companion: **'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'**. Paradoxically, **this companionship becomes life-giving in self-donation, and destructive in selfish exploitation.** The true beauty of human sexuality shines out as this self-donation finds expression in the body language which is part of God's creation; Jesus quotes the Genesis text, **'the two become one'**. The body language of sexuality is not only the expression of authentic self-donation, but also the source of new human lives – **marriage is a sharing in the work of the Creator, we become co-creators with God.**

We are called by God to love him and be faithful. But not to live in an unambiguous world in which the choices are spelled out for us in the beginning and are easy to figure. For someone deciding whether to end a broken relationship the choice is never easy. But we know that God loves us and dreams a creative, meaningful life for us. And all along we must decide. In the Letter to the Hebrews (2:9-11) Saint Paul tells us that **Jesus died that we might be saved from the power of death. Death haunted those around him as deaths sometimes haunt us. Death for us takes many forms. Physical death is just one of those forms. Death of a relationship is another. We must live trusting in God's gift of freedom to us through the life of Jesus. A life of freedom is a life that is full of responsibilities and choices. Let us live in response to that good gift.**