

27th Sunday of Year B, 6 October 2012

Genesis: 2:18-24

Hebrews: 2:9-11

Mark 10: 2-16

Some things never change. When Jesus told the apostles about the indissolubility of marriage, namely that divorce was not in God's original plan for a man and a woman in a covenanted relationship for life, the apostles protested, "Then who would get married?". As we know today many men and women live together outside of marriage. Whatever they personally believe about its obligations, their reluctance to marry implies they realize the traditional understanding that it involves a life-time commitment. For many today the future is too unpredictable; someone else more attractive may come along, or pursuit of personal careers get in the way; there are lots of excuses.

Even what constitutes marriage is put to the test in our time by the Gay-Lesbian-Transgender lobby's agenda, claiming it as a right which they are denied by state and church. This is an issue being tested in the courts, in ecclesiastical hierarchical bodies and by state referendums. One hopes and prays the traditional meaning of the word 'marriage' applies only to a vowed union between a man and a woman.

Though there are some exceptional cultural and religious arrangements for marriages, there are commonly accepted legal requirements for a marriage to be valid: intellectual and sexual maturity of the man and woman, that they are not of very close degrees of blood and in-law relationship, both enter freely into the contract, that it is witnessed in a religious or civil venue before an authorized official, and it is consummated by conjugal relations. The church's teaching adds that the couple be open to the generation of new life by their sexual union where biologically possible. Marriage obviously is more than a mere private union between two people. It has implications in the familial and social order that go beyond just the private lives of the couple.

If there is no longer an acceptance of its exclusiveness; that is, fidelity to one's spouse only, then there is no meaning to the sixth commandment regarding adultery. Jesus expanded the meaning of that commandment in his opening sermon, "You have heard the commandment 'You shall not commit adultery.' What I say to you is that anyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his thoughts." He did not condemn the woman brought to him caught in adultery, but told her to go and sin no more. When he told the Samaritan woman at the well that she was living with her seventh man, she, a gentile, knew what she was doing was wrong.

The Book of Genesis describes a time before sin entered the world where Adam and Eve lived harmoniously together, both equally made in the image and likeness of God, unaware that they were naked because there was no disorder in their passions. There was no lusting, domination, blaming, or infidelity. Then sin entered the picture and everything changed. Their disobedience brought disharmony within each of them as well as between them. Ever since then all of us their descendants experience the urge of passions wrestling with the right order of reason.

Prostitution, rape, incest, pornography, masturbation, massage parlors, and child sexual abuse are the sad results of the weaknesses of the flesh with its unruly passions. That is why the church holds up the virtues of chastity and celibacy to counteract these evils, which degrade the beauty and noble purpose of the way God has made us male and female. In the time under the law of Moses, divorce was permitted, Jesus says, "because of the hardness of your hearts." Struggling with his own experience of the law of the flesh warring against the law of the spirit, Paul exclaims, "What a wretched man I am. Who will deliver me from this body under the power of death?" We know his answer, "All praise to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Grace is a divine favor added to the best inclinations of our fallen nature that aids us in responding to love both human and divine by loving obedience and fidelity in return. The relationship of law and grace is concisely expressed by the aphorism, "The law was given so grace we would seek; grace was given so the law we can keep." Paul wrote to the Romans, "The law of the spirit, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, has freed you from the law of sin and death. The law was powerless because of its weakening by the flesh. Then God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, thereby condemning sin in the flesh so that the just demands of the law

might be fulfilled.... The tendency of the flesh is toward death but that of the spirit toward life and peace.... You are not in the flesh; you are in the spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.”

If married couples want to be faithful to their solemn vows for the duration of their lives they need to bring Jesus into their relationship. The church teaches that there is a grace in the sacrament of matrimony that they can call on, count on, in times of temptation or conflict, to keep them faithful to one another. Without that grace it is rare that spouses remain faithful to each other, given the selfish inclinations of our fallen human nature. Similar things can be said of course about priestly and vowed consecrated life.

The Son of God, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Mary, willingly became a man like us taking on our human flesh to sanctify it, make it possible for us to live holy lives with God and peaceably with one another. “Without me you can do nothing,” Jesus said; while when we remain in union with him, all things are possible, even to become a saint. He has given us his own Spirit, the Lord and giver of Life, to guide us into all truth and set us free. It is the same Spirit that moves us to come together to offer fitting worship and sacrifice to God in this Mass. By uniting ourselves with Jesus’ own perfect sacrifice, we can receive in communion his sacramental body and blood, the pledge of a promised life at peace with God now and for eternity. To such a gracious and loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit let there be worthy praise, honor, glory and obedience now and forever. AMEN