

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2015

The readings of this Sunday talk about the reality of marriage. They show that God created man and woman so that they complete each other and share their lives in a union of marriage. They invite us to live the bond of marriage according to God's will and not according to human intention.

The first reading of the book of Genesis recalls the creation of man and woman at the beginning of creation. It shows that in order to drive the man out of solitude, God created the woman as his partner of life. It shows also that God has made things in such a way that man and woman live together and form one flesh.

What is behind this text is the idea that marriage is not simply a human institution, but rather has been created by God. There is also the idea that marriage creates a bond of unity between a man and a woman that nothing can destroy. The last idea is related to the truth that the desire of living together between a man and a woman is not just human, but comes from God.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the question of divorce. First of all, the Gospel talks about the question asked of Jesus by the Pharisees about the legality of divorce according to Moses' injunction. Then, it reports on Jesus' reaction affirming the indissolubility of marriage according to God's primary intention as expressed at the creation of the world.

After that, it reports on the conversation between Jesus and his disciples and his explanation about the outcome of the divorce. The Gospel ends up with the narrative of Jesus blessing children brought to him and his invitation to the disciples that they might be like them.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the reality of marriage. First of all, I have to confess that I am not an expert on marriage or family. Given your experience as married people, you are certainly better suited than I to talk about it without difficulty. If, however, in spite of all that, I dare to speak, it is because I am convinced that as an interested witness who has been involved with married people for more than thirty years now as a priest, I can say something meaningful which can help the couple live their marriage according to God's will.

My starting point is an ordinary observation. In fact, as human beings, we are relational beings. Our life in society is structured by relationships like that with family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors, strangers, etc. All those relationships are the result of circumstances of time and space. They are all linked to events or places that have engendered them.

Because, they are linked to circumstances, relationships come and go. However, unlike those other relationships, marriage is a special and unique relationship. It creates a bond that lasts forever and results in the procreation of children. Moreover, unlike the other relationships, marriage is the only relationship that can be traced back to God at the beginning of the creation.

Because of that, marriage says something about God and his intention in creating man and woman. For that specific reason, marriage is not only a human institution, that is, a human right; it is also a gift from God to humanity; it is a sacrament. That is what the

book of Genesis as well as the Gospel tries to bring by saying that the man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and the two become one flesh. Moreover, because God's intention is involved in it, marriage becomes the image of God who is one and undivided. That is why the love that a man and woman feel in their hearts is at the image of God who was the first to love us by sending his son Jesus into our world.

In that sense, the tolerance shown by Moses by permitting divorce was not in God's original plan. It was due to the sin of hardness of hearts, because man and woman were created to be one flesh so that what God has joined no human might separate. In other words, divorce as well as other forms of conjugal union, though backed up by our culture and society, do not reflect God's initial plan. They are human accommodations which do not correspond to God's plan. Only monogamy and indissoluble marriage respects the original plan of God and fulfills the aim for which sexuality was created.

This statement does not bear any judgment on divorced people or remarried couples or those living in any form of conjugal union. It does not even discuss the reasons why people divorce, if they are good or bad. It just affirms that whether it is because of alleged incompatibility of characters, abuses or any other reason, the divorce is something that was not in God's initial plan.

Moreover, the evocation of the permission given by Moses to divorce shows already that marriage is not an easy business, so is the divorce. In fact, marriage requires a big decision for someone to enter it. The divorce too is a huge decision that reverses the whole trajectory of the life of someone. It often leaves wounds and hurts in the heart of people. It can even lead to a lot of suffering.

For that reason, I do not take those questions lightly, because my experience as a priest has instructed me a lot about marriage. Consequently, I have a deep respect for all those who, for one reason or another, have made a decision for their lives in one way or another. It is not my right to condemn them; neither does the Church. What we can all do is to pray for them, their children and their families, and recommend them to the mercy of Jesus.

I also believe that by bringing together in a same narrative the question of divorce and the incident of children to whom none can enter the kingdom of God unless he resembles them, Jesus wants to tell us that the healing in marriage comes about when the married couples strive to live their union like children. And yet, we know the main characters of children, namely innocence, openness, forgiveness, powerlessness, non-resentment, dependence on adult and, in the case of the kingdom, dependence on God alone. Those things can bring healing in a marriage and make it stand in spite of difficulties and hardships. Let us pray, then, that God may bless all the couples and families throughout the world. God bless you!

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



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