

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B
October 8, 2006
St. Mark's, 10:30 p.m. Sunday
Genesis 2:18-24
Hebrews 2:9-11
Mark 10:2-16

Divorce.

Divorce. It's a word we hear a lot today. It isn't an easy topic to stand up here and talk about. Most everyone knows someone who is divorced. Most everyone has some reaction when they hear divorce.

I am no exception. I have never been married myself. In my family there is much divorce. My own parents divorced when I was nine or ten years old. Several of my other relatives have been divorced. It is an issue that touches everyone.

Yet Jesus tells us that isn't the way it is meant to be. The Pharisees have asked Jesus if divorce is lawful. The Mosaic Law allowed for divorce. Jesus says Moses allowed only because the people had hardened their hearts. In Mark's Gospel that we read from today, Jesus doesn't make any exception but Matthew's Gospel clarifies that there can be no divorce unless the marriage is unlawful.

To understand what Jesus says about marriage we must understand how the Jews interpreted marriage. Today, we generally think of marriage as for love. In Jesus' time, most marriages would have been arranged by the parents. The couple may not even see each other before the marriage. Marriage was not seen as a religious event. It was not even seen as a civil event to be regulated by the government. It was an act between two people that involved their whole families. Marriages were often arranged to strengthen one or both families. Marriages were not done for love and unity.

That is what Jesus wants to set straight. There are reasons to get divorced. If you are being abused or are unsafe in your marriage get out! Jesus doesn't expect you to get hurt just to honor a marriage!

This is what Jesus really wants to set straight. To allow for free divorce is to miss the whole point of marriage. Marriage isn't about two people living together until they can't stand each other.

Today, we do try to marry for love. We must take it seriously. We live in a world of disposable things today. But marriages are not disposable.

Where does Jesus turn to show us what marriage is supposed to be? He turns to the *beginning*. It is Creation before the Fall that he says has the answer. It is in the story of Creation that we find what Pope John Paul II termed *original unity*.

Adam was created by God to live in the Garden and to take care of it. Adam was alone. God realized "It is not good for man to be alone." So, God set out to make a "suitable partner" for Adam. God created all the animals and brought them before Adam. Adam named each of them. Now this naming is important because, in the Jewish understanding, to name something is to know what it truly is. So, Adam knew what each animal was truly like and none of them were a suitable partner for him. They were different from him.

Adam knew he had a consciousness and a rational mind that the animals did not. They were not that one special partner. God knew this too.

So, God cast a deep sleep upon Adam. This sleep shouldn't be thought of as like being put under by an anesthetic. It is more profound than that. Adam was put into a state of "pre-consciousness." God created woman from the rib of Adam. But woman is

not created in the image of man. Women too are created in the image of God. The rib signifies that man and woman are of the same essence. Male and female are not identical. We are different physical but also internally. We are meant to be complementally to one another in body and spirit.

It is because they are of the same essence that man and woman are suitable partners for each other. It is because they are both created in the image of God, like each other yet different that they become one flesh.

Man was not meant to be alone. We cannot fully know ourselves when we are alone. I know myself that I used to be something of a loner but it is in coming out of my shell that I more truly learn about myself. It is only by interacting with others and in entering into relationship with others that we find out who we are ourselves.

To give a very simplistic answer, think of watching your favorite TV show or a football game or game show. Would you rather watch it alone or with someone else? Man is not meant to be alone.

So, we find others by interacting with others. Casual friends are good, but they are not enough. Close friends are even better. It is with them that we share more of our true feelings. Yet, we don't always share everything with them either.

It is in the coming together as male and female *in marriage* that we can totally give ourselves to one another. And by inviting God into marriage it makes the marriage truly where two become one flesh.

Now, I imagine someone is thinking right now, "What does he know? He is going to be a priest. He is talking about a romanticized marriage. Life isn't that perfect." I do know life isn't perfect. I do know all marriages aren't perfect. Remember, I told

you that my parents are divorced and that several of my other relatives are divorced too. I know others who live happily.

Marriages aren't perfect because humans aren't perfect. But if we listen to what God tells us about the real meaning of purpose and invite him to be part of the marriage then we can come closer to perfection.

Jesus transforms things. He created the world. He renews creation in his death and resurrection. He transforms the bread and wine into his Body and Blood. So too can he transform your marriage if you let him.

We must be willing to accept his help. He is willing to give us this gift but we must be willing to receive the gift. Jesus loves the children. The children are open to the gift of God. Are we willing to receive the truth of Jesus?