

27th Sunday of the Year (B)

October 7, 2018

Genesis 2:18-34

Psalm 128

Hebrews 2:9-11

Mark 10:2-16

This week, Eric who takes care of our lawn asked me if I had any weddings coming up. He had this idea that October was the season for weddings and he wanted to make sure that the church grounds were looking their best. I told him that I do have three weddings over the next five weeks but there was no season for weddings. I went on to say that I have many who are testing the waters but they do not seem to be that interested in marriage. They would rather just test the waters and push marriage out into the future. Eric understood what I was saying and he said things have really changed. I agreed that over my years as a priest, things have really changed.

So marriage seems to be the central focus of the sacred word this Sunday. In no generation and in no culture has there ever been a “golden age” when all marriages have been perfect. Yet, the longing for a perfect marriage is pretty universal. We older folks can remember a time when the church and society were able to keep divorce to a minimum. I have read that presently 50% of marriages end in divorce. And surprisingly, 80% of re-marriages end in divorce. Taking into consideration those individuals who simply choose to live together and not ask for the blessing of marriage, things have indeed changed. Into the reality of this mix of the present, the sacred word compels us to ponder marriage and what God intended for us human folks.

Even though the scriptures before us today indicate differently, it seems that we know little about the practice of divorce in Jesus’ day. The Dead Sea Scrolls rarely mention divorce and generally forbid it. The culture of the day was patriarchal, and the Torah was vague about grounds for divorce. So there is very little evidence how divorce functioned in Jewish society in the time of Jesus. By contrast, in the Greek-Roman world that surrounded and often times enveloped Jewish lives, divorce is often referenced and given abundant details regarding the grounds and the process for ending a marriage. In a similar situation, it seems to me that the church today is surrounded by a society and culture that is not only more welcoming to divorce but is more than willing to let the institution of marriage be diminished. So here we are trying to uphold the teaching of the sacred word, living in the midst of a world view that is changing dramatically.

The Pharisees wanted to defend the law, that is what they were all about. Yet, they were probably not aware that in questioning Jesus they would *more than meet* their match. Where many of the Pharisees criticized Jesus’ background, they were probably not aware that this teacher had a father who considered divorce when his mother was pregnant with him. Jesus took their shared family history back to the very beginning, to God’s original plan in the creation of humanity. “God made them male and female,” he

told them. God declared that human beings were not meant to be alone; they belong to one another.

Jesus went way beyond the question the Pharisees proposed. As Jesus focused upon divorce, remarriage, and adultery, he was making a profound statement about the treatment of women. God did not intend to create woman and then have her treated as property, handed from father to husband. Nor did Jesus intend that a husband or wife could discard one another without serious consideration and thought for the other. Jesus was challenging the Pharisees *and his own disciples* with the idea of fidelity and equality, that the least among you needs to be embraced with dignity and respect. This is what Jesus is pointing out when he rebuked the disciples and asked for the children to come to him.

The Pharisees remind us that from earliest times, exceptions permitted divorce. The hardness of the heart is a part of our human condition; we are far from perfect. Yet, we are baptized members of Christ, as church we must uphold the dignity of each human person. God did not intend any one of us to be alone, but that we might know love, peace, and the fullest life possible. We each know that divorce is here and will remain, but we must learn to respect one another, to hold and embrace one another with the greatest dignity.

We give thanks to God for the many marriages that are indeed long-lasting and filled with life and love. We pray for those marriages that are in trouble, struggling to survive. We ask for God's healing grace for those family members who have been hurt and negatively impacted by divorce. May understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness help us leave all rancor, bitterness, and hatred behind.

An imperfect people, an imperfect church, we hear the sacred word and receive Christ in Eucharist today, to help us move toward what God intended!