

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



Fr Michael says:

We are in a Society which is asking itself about Marriage, the Synod on marriage and Family Life is starting very soon and we need to be clear where we are and what do we feel about the various issues, which are being discussed, to address the many pastoral issues involved. The Sacrament of Marriage is presented as an ideal towards which we must work and strive to achieve in our daily lives. We recognise there are many different pastoral situations which exist and which require sensitive and caring pastoral care. Jesus' message supports and encourages those whose lives have not allowed them to achieve this reality fully.

As usual, Jesus asked a question. 'What did Moses command you?' He didn't *command* divorce. He *allowed* it under controlled conditions. Jesus refers the Pharisees back to the Genesis account – that God has designed us for relationship and that marriage is such a relationship as to make the two people into one entity. God is the one who joins people together in such a relationship. What a privilege!

He gives two answers, you'll notice: one public and one private. The private answer is the one where he comes clean about what he thinks of Herod and Herodias ('and if a woman divorces her husband,' is quite specific!). I think that although Mark is showing us some of what Jesus thinks about marriage, he is highlighting the fact that Jesus' ministry involved having to be very careful. He had a specific mission to bring the kingdom of God into being and he had to be extraordinarily clever to avoid political intrigue and the pitfalls of the throwaway remark. In fact, he never throws language around. The culture of the Hebrews was that words are alive and hugely powerful. Perhaps we should think about that? If we have something to say, it should have the integrity of Jesus' words. Let's be careful with how we talk about things that matter – especially things that involve the vulnerability of the human condition.

However, Jesus is very clear in the Gospel in what He says: Marriage is indissoluble, basing Himself on the teachings of Genesis, that male and female are called to become one with each other in their lives and so fulfil the vision that God has for this important area of life.

A strong message but one which is very realistic, as I can vouch for over my nearly 50 years of journeying with couples seeking to create the marriage covenant.

In marriage, two lives are inextricably linked together, with a common destiny in view and through their mutual enrichment of ideals, personalities, qualities, characteristics – and indeed their faults and failings, they communicate and share as they seek to create together the vision of what they wish to attain in their marriage. It is a Mission statement. It is offered, to God, to each other and to all in the Church. God made us to love, by receiving and giving it, this is a process which is gradually learned through their actually living the Covenant together daily. Problems are to be seen as opportunities to grow together: they are invitations to look together at how this is to be done and the more that they can share and receive each other's gifts and insights the more they will move forward. Storms that are weathered are sources of strength for the future! It is a life-long process!

A man asked a Rabbi if they might make a slight change of the ceremony. He proposed that the words: "till death do us part" be replaced by "for as long as love lasts." This was something they had both discussed and agreed to suggest; as they did not think it right that a couple should be tied to a relationship which no longer existed. The rabbi replied: "I can't make the change. You and I both know that there is such a thing as divorce, and a lot of marriages don't last until one partner dies. If you go into marriage with an attitude of "If it doesn't work out, we can always split", then I can almost guarantee you that things won't work out for you. I appreciate your honesty, but you must understand that a marriage commitment is not just a mutual willingness to live together, but a commitment to accept the frustrations and disappointments that are an inevitable part of two imperfect human beings relating to each other. It's hard enough to make a go of marriage when you give it everything you've got – but if only a part of you is involved in the relationship, then you have virtually no chance."