

Sunday Message

THE WORD

Year B • Psalter Week 3

DIVORCE AND CHILDREN

(MARK 10:2-16)



Today, we have first a confrontation between some Pharisees and Jesus over the question of divorce. Mark tells us that “they were testing him”.

Divorce was common in the Jewish world of the time, and there were different schools of thought as to the reason why a man – and it would be a man – could divorce his wife. For once, Jesus sides with the stricter interpretation of the Law and describes the concession in the teaching of Deuteronomy as due to “hardness of heart”, closing one’s understanding and emotions to the truth. He bases his view on the divine plan set out in Genesis as the ideal for marriage, one flesh in a permanent union.

The second section of the reading is one of the very few examples from the Bible or the wider literature of the time which concentrate on children: young people, from infants to the age of twelve, were not regarded as persons in their own right. Jesus, on the other hand, takes a positive interest in them, becoming “indignant” when the disciples, for reasons we are not given, try to prevent them being brought to him. Once again, Mark shows the disciples in a negative light, not understanding that the kingdom is a gift, or who can receive it. ■

REFLECT

The question of divorce – or more accurately, of the remarriage of divorced persons – is one of the most vexing problems in the Church today. But it is nothing new: Jesus said, according to Mark, that divorce is not possible; however, Paul and Matthew give exceptions to this blanket prohibition. Jesus puts forward the ideal of marriage as a permanent union which the husband (“no man”) is not entitled to break. It is only fair to say that the concerns we may have today about a person’s suitability to enter into marriage from a psychological point of view have only emerged in recent years. Whereas marriage was spoken of in the past in terms of a legal contract, it is now presented in the biblical language of a covenant, the sacred relationship between God and Israel, between Christ and the Church: a high ideal indeed, one which requires commitment and sacrifice by the partners involved. How to deal with people whose marriages have failed is an urgent pastoral problem, but as we can see from the New Testament scriptures, one which the disciples of Jesus have had to wrestle with from the beginning. It is for the community to find the answer.

The second section of the Gospel reading presents Jesus paying attention to figures who have no legal standing at all, who are totally dependent on others and receive everything as a gift, as they have no rights. Jesus is angry with his obtuse disciples who try to prevent the children reaching him: when they do, he hugs them, transfers power to them by laying on his hands and calling down God’s blessing upon them. Might not divorced and remarried persons today be represented by those children? ■

SAY

“Let the little children come to me... for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”

(see Mark 10:14)

LEARN

There was no one official interpretation of the Jewish Law: there was a wide range of opinions.

At the time of Jesus, the two most influential rabbis were Shammai (strict) and Hillel (milder).

Jesus’ approach is generally similar to that of Hillel, except for his teaching on divorce, which is nearer to that of Shammai.

DO

When you go forward to receive Holy Communion, remember that it is a gift, not a reward.



ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Within your will, O Lord, all things are established,
and there is none that can resist your will.
For you have made all things, the heaven and the earth,
and all that is held within the circle of heaven;
you are the Lord of all.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

Almighty ever-living God,
who in the abundance of your kindness
surpass the merits and the desires of those
who entreat you,
pour out your mercy upon us
to pardon what conscience dreads
and to give what prayer does not dare to ask.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Genesis 2:18-24

A reading from the book of Genesis.

The Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helpmate." So from the soil the Lord God fashioned all the wild beasts and all the birds of heaven. These he brought to the man to see what he would call them; each one was to bear the name the man would give it. The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of heaven and all the wild beasts. But no helpmate suitable for man was found for him. So the Lord God made the man fall into a deep sleep. And while he slept, he took one of his ribs and enclosed it in flesh. The Lord built the rib he had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man. The man exclaimed:

"This at last is bone from my bones,
and flesh from my flesh!
This is to be called woman
for this was taken from man."

This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 127

Response:

May the Lord bless us
all the days of our life.

- 1 O blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways!
By the labour of your hands you shall eat.
You will be happy and prosper. (R.)
- 2 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the heart of your house;
your children like shoots of the olive, around your table. (R.)
- 3 Indeed thus shall be blessed the man who fears the Lord.
May the Lord bless you from Zion in a happy Jerusalem
all the days of your life!
May you see your children's children.
On Israel, peace! (R.)

SECOND READING

Hebrews 2:9-11

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

We see in Jesus one who was for a short while made lower than the angels and is now crowned with glory and splendour because he submitted to death; by God's grace he had to experience death for all mankind.

As it was his purpose to bring a great many of his sons into glory, it was appropriate that God, for whom everything exists and through whom everything exists, should make perfect, through suffering, the leader who would take them to their salvation. For the one who sanctifies, and the ones who are sanctified, are of the same stock; that is why he openly calls them brothers.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

Your word is truth, O Lord,
consecrate us in the truth.

Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mark 10:2-16

(For shorter form, read between > <)

> A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

Some Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, "Is it against the law for a man to divorce his wife?" They were testing him. He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" "Moses allowed us" they said, "to draw up a writ of dismissal and so to divorce." Then Jesus said to them, "It was because you were so unteachable that he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. This is why a man must leave father and mother, and the two become one body. They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide." Back in the house the disciples questioned him again about this, and he said to them, "The man who divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another she is guilty of adultery too." <

People were bringing little children to him, for him to touch them. The disciples turned them away, but when Jesus saw this he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little

children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I tell you solemnly, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Then he put his arms round them, laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing.

> The Gospel of the Lord. <

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;

through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,

he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,

who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins

and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead

and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Accept, O Lord, we pray,
the sacrifices instituted by your commands
and, through the sacred mysteries,
which we celebrate with dutiful service,
graciously complete the sanctifying work
by which you are pleased to redeem us.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

The Lord is good to those who hope in him,
to the soul that seeks him.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant us, almighty God,
that we may be refreshed and nourished
by the Sacrament which we have received,
so as to be transformed into what we
consume.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.