

## **Marriage is more than ‘just the two of us’**

There’s a story about a couple of friends who were talking about their home lives over a cup of coffee. One man looked up, sighed loudly, and said to the other: “I have a **WONDERFUL** marriage. We have only **ONE** problem ... my wife’s **MEMORY**.” With compassion in his eyes and voice, his friend asked, “You mean she keeps **FORGETTING** things?” “No,” the first man said. “The problem is that she **REMEMBERS** everything!”

Today’s readings from the Hebrew Scriptures, the Gospel, and even the Responsorial Psalm are about marriage. And, while it may not appear that way at first, the Epistle, too, is related to the other readings.

In the Old Testament, **LITTLE** is said about what a perfect marriage entails ... other than that the wife should always be pleasing to her husband. And if husbands got tired of their wives, then – because of the hardness of their hearts – the Jewish Law said that they could be divorced.

Jesus **CHANGED** all that.

He reminded the Pharisees that it was **GOD** who instituted the **BOND** we call marriage.

In the book of Genesis, Moses tells us that it was God who **CREATED** the first man and the first woman. Adam gave **NAMES** to all the animals. But when the first **WOMAN** was created, Adam did **NOT** give her a name. In the Hebrew Scriptures – in what we sometimes call the Old Testament – to **NAME** something was to **OWN** it.

And the first woman was **NOT** Adam's property!

She was his loving partner ...

**FOR ALL TIME!!!**

Only later did she receive the name "Eve," which means "mother of all the living."

The biblical teaching here is one of **COMPLEMENTARITY** and **EQUALITY** in a mutually exclusive **BOND**.

Now, there are those who will **INSIST** that it is the **MAN** who is the senior partner ... the one in **CHARGE** within the marriage ... the one who "wears the pants" in the family.

In my humble opinion – having just celebrated 25 years of marriage – those who advocate **THAT** position are **NOT** likely to have smooth sailing at home ... or anywhere else!

And those who ask, “Who is **SUPPOSED** to be the **HEAD** of the household?” are **IGNORING** our Savior’s teaching.

A Christian should **NEVER** ask who is going to be the **MASTER**.

A Christian **SHOULD** ask who is going to be the **SERVANT!!!**

If **EVERY** husband and wife humbled themselves, putting the wants and needs of his or her or spouse first, there would certainly be **MUCH** less divorce, that severing – by man – of the **BOND** that God created.

It is an unfortunate truth that many families **HAVE** suffered through the agony of divorce ... and **LIVE** with that agony – that wounded spirit – sometimes every day for the rest of their lives.

Many believe that – being divorced – they are denied the Sacraments. This is NOT true! It is only if they remarry outside the Church that problems arise.

In that light, today’s gospel may very well feel like yet **ANOTHER** wound.

Jesus is **VERY** clear about his **DISAPPROVAL** of divorce ... **BUT** ... the **CONTEXT** should be noted.

To **WHOM** is Jesus speaking? He is **NOT** speaking to those who are divorced. Or even to those who are **SEEKING** divorce.

He is speaking to a group of Pharisees – Jewish religious lawyers – who are trying to **TRICK** him into saying something against the Law of Moses so that they could denounce him.

Themselves experts in the Jewish Law, they challenged Jesus in **LEGAL** language ... and he responded in kind.

Jesus is **FRUSTRATED** ... !!!

The Pharisees are too **MYOPIC** ... their concern too shortsighted.

They **KNOW** that God created marriage from the very beginning ... that marriage is, in fact, a part of **CREATION** ... and thus part of God's plan.

They are using the Jewish Law to find the **EASY** path, but Jesus is **NEVER** one to take the easy path.

He is going to take the **NARROW** path ... the right path.

Jesus **ACKNOWLEDGED** that Moses made exceptions in the Law regarding divorce because of sin – and their hard-heartedness – but He pointed out to the Pharisees that the **EXCEPTIONS** should not be their concern.

How to avoid **SIN** and how to follow **GOD'S WILL** should be paramount in their minds and hearts.

The psalmist wrote: “Blessed are you who fear the Lord, who walk in His ways!”

**THAT** is the context of our Scriptures today.

So ... **HOW** do we “walk in His ways”?

Jesus said “Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a **CHILD** will not enter it.”

In Christ’s time, children hardly even **REGISTERED** as human beings. Infant mortality was so high -- upwards of 60 percent -- that newborns weren’t even presented at the Temple until the eighth day of life.

By then – **MAYBE** – the child had a chance to live. It was **ONLY** then that the child was dedicated to God and publicly given a name.

While they were certainly loved by their parents, children who survived infancy **STILL** had **NO** status and **NO** rights.

For Jesus to give such attention and importance to these children was a **GROSS** breach of his society's norms.

Jesus **TOUCHED** the children – which means he **BLESSED** them – as blessings were **ALWAYS** given through the laying on of hands.

Jesus gave them **STATUS**.

Today – on “Respect Life Sunday” – we should dwell on that just a bit.

While it may **SEEM** that kids today have much more status and many more rights than children back in first century Palestine, our culture of **INDIVIDUALISM** – where the **DESIRES** of the individual **TRUMP** the **NEEDS** of the community – gives a **QUARTER** of them even **FEWER** rights ... those who are **MOST** vulnerable ... those waiting to be **BORN**.

The U.S. Declaration of Independence calls the **RIGHT TO LIFE** an **INALIENABLE** right.

But ... for **ONE AND A QUARTER MILLION** unborn babies each and every year, that **RIGHT** is **DENIED** ... many times because they are just plain “**INCONVENIENT**”!

The Guttmacher Institute, which is **NOT** friendly towards the Pro-Life movement, says that **TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT** of **ALL** pregnancies in the U.S. are **INTENTIONALLY** aborted. **SEVENTY-FIVE** percent of the mothers who abort their babies say that they are Christian. A **THIRD** of **THOSE** say that they are Catholic.

Sadly, nearly **HALF** of the women who seek abortions have had at least one other abortion.

Pro-Life groups report even **HIGHER** figures.

The Supreme Court, in deciding Roe v. Wade, said that abortion should be **LEGAL** ... **BUT** it also said that abortion should be **RARE**.

How **RARE** is a **QUARTER** of **ALL** pregnancies?

Eve – “mother of all the living” – **AND** our Mother Mary must both be shedding untold tears over this mass slaughter of defenseless children who are mercilessly ripped from the safety of their own mother’s wombs.

Many of these abortions can be credited to our society of individualism where a pregnancy – instead of being a joy and blessing to the parents – is looked upon as a “**PROBLEM**” to be “**SOLVED**” through abortion ...

... to be “**SOLVED**” by simply **DESTROYING** innocent lives. Never mind the **WRECKAGE** abortions leave behind.

It is **SAD** note that kittens and puppies have **MORE** protection in this country that our own unborn **HUMAN** offspring.

Many couples say that abortion is a way for them to **PLAN** their families.

It would seem to be just the opposite. Abortion is seen as a way to **NOT** plan a family ... to **ELIMINATE** what God has made the natural outcome of the love between a man and a woman.

And while the Church certainly encourages married couples to **PLAN** their families, **KILLING** their unborn children as a matter of convenience is certainly **NOT** a tool that is in accordance with the Church's teachings ... nor does it reflect plain old Christian ethics.

And they have left an important person out of the equation.

It goes without saying that parents seeking abortion have **NOT** consulted with their baby.

If they did, what would they say?

"Baby, do you want to live?"

"Yes, Mommy, I want to live **SO** much!"

"Well, too bad, little one, because your father and I just don't think it's **TIME** for us to raise a family. Sorry, but you've got to go."

And ... there is still one **MORE** person that they have forgotten about.

I'm talking about ... God.

God gives parents a **ROLE** in creating new life.

By **DESTROYING** that life, we are **SNUBBING** God.

It is said that marriage is the basis for society.

The marital bond – that sometimes nebulous thread that brings and keeps couples together – is just **ONE** part of the structure that upholds society.

There is also the bonding of **GENERATIONS**.

Each of us is a link between the past and the future.

As parents bond with their children, they pass on the heritage of the past.

As children bond with their parents, they open up to them the possibilities of the future which the parents themselves will not see with their own eyes.

Children **ENRICH** our lives “like olive plants around the table.”

No **WONDER** the psalmist prays “May you see your children’s children”!

They are our way of looking into the future. And the way we **BOND** with them is our way of influencing that future.

Now, carry this bonding forward to our relationship with God.

Through Jesus, we are able to call God “Our Father”! As our Lord Jesus Christ’s sisters and brothers we are bonded with **HIM**, and **THROUGH** Him we are bonded with God the Father.

This is all in God’s plan.

But break any of these bonds and we would once again be alone.

By breaking the marital bond ... or by breaking the bond with our unborn children ... we are attempting to sever the very **UNITY** of God.

**MOSES** wasn’t able to change the Israelites’ hearts so he **GAVE IN** to their callous demands.

On the other hand, **JESUS** will **NOT** allow hard-heartedness to compromise His love for us ... so he **PURIFIES** our hearts by renewing and refashioning them in the same love that binds him to the Father.

He gives us **NEW** hearts ... **NATURAL** hearts ... **LOVING** hearts.

He makes our hearts like the hearts of little children so that we can approach him without hesitation, without hindrance, **AS** children.

Then – and **ONLY** then – we can rejoice to be rid of **EVERY** human inclination to seek separation and division as we are welcomed into God's presence through the Eucharist and the Holy Spirit.

If we seek to be bonded with Him, and – through Him – to the Father, we are no longer alone, no longer strangers to God's will.

Our hearts will no longer be hard and we will receive our husbands, our wives – and our **CHILDREN** – with God's love ...

... **THROUGHOUT** our whole being.

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Respect Life Sunday  
Dcn. Bob Skinner, Oct. 4, 2009

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