

27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, B
MARRIAGE: A JOURNEY OF PERSEVERANCE IN LOVE
“Is it against the law for a man to divorce his wife?” (Mark 10:2)

Marriage Is A Journey: There is no doubt that the state of marriage and family is getting worse by the day. Our world does not seem to give the deserved value to these cradle institutions of our society. The perception and commitment have altered according to the liberal shifts in social ideologies. However, marriage remains a beautiful gift with its attendant challenges. I have known people who have lived very sincerely in marriage bearing the piercings of the thorns of marriage and savouring its fragrance, but the marriage still ended in separation. I know people whose several years of marital bliss and endurance have ended up in the cabinets of Church tribunals. And all those years suffer irreversible and traumatic experiences under the cudgel of nullification. I also know couples who have borne the piercings of the thorns, savoured the sweet fragrances and enjoyed the enduring fruits of marriage for many years and still have reasons to smile because they are still very much in love. Marriage, like every other aspect of human life, is a journey full of highs that must be enjoyed with gratitude, and lows that must be endured with perseverance. Today, our attention is turned to this fundamental institution of human society.

Marriage As God's Initiative: The First Reading (Genesis 1: 18-24) reveals some unique attributes of marriage, namely:

- That marriage was/is God's initiative – out of His loving care, God, seeing the loneliness of man, Adam, decided to create a woman for the man. “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2: 18). This alludes to the sacredness and sanctity of marriage. The purpose of our creation is for us to be in communion with one another. Man, by nature is a social being, a *homo socius*.
- That the woman was/is a helper or helpmate, and not a servant. – “I will make him a suitable helpmate” (Genesis 2: 18). A helper or helpmate or companion refers to one complementing the man. It stresses complementarity and reciprocity, rather than a servant or one who must be subservient. The woman is, therefore, a companion, who must be loved and respected by the man.
- That for the man and the woman the path to wholeness is not that of solitude but to be in communion with one another; the coming together of the two persons in love gives birth to the family – “This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins with his wife, and they become one body” (Genesis 2: 24).
- That marriage was/is intended as a union between one man and one woman for male and female He made them – monogamy and the heterosexual union is the stand of the Bible and nothing else.

It does not matter what we think and which ideological school of thought we belong to. The ways of God on this matter is clear. This is where the Church stands. What about you?

Indissolubility of Marriage: In the Gospel narrative (Mark 10: 2-16), Jesus reiterates the interpretation of God's initial intention and adds the element of indissolubility. The issue of divorce was a contentious one among the ancient Jews and those of the time of Jesus. It occupied a prominent place in the teachings of the Rabbis, tilting between the strict and the lax interpretations of Deuteronomy 24: 1, which says: "If a man marries a woman and then dislikes her because of some notable defect he discovers in her, he may write a certificate of divorce, give it to the woman and send her away from his house." Rabbi Shammai taught a strict interpretation of this that unless the woman commits adultery there could be no divorce. Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, had a very liberal interpretation: that if a wife burnt the dish; spoke to a strange man; spoke disrespectfully of her husband's relatives in his hearing and if she was a brawling woman she could be divorced. True to human nature, the laxer teaching of Hillel became more popular. But Jesus did not take sides with any of these schools of thought. Instead, He took them back to the provisions of Moses to establish the grounds for him to teach them the truth. Jesus made it clear that the concession of Moses was not a volitional and regular norm, but it was because of their "hardness of heart." Then Jesus stated these facts about marriage:

- That the initial intention of the Creator was for marriage to be between a male and a female – "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female" (Mark 10: 6).
- That marriage symbolises the wholeness of the man whose rib was taken at creation – "They are no longer two but one body" (Mark 10: 8).
- That marriage is indissoluble – "What God has united; man must not divide" (Mark 10: 9).

Where do we stand as a Church? What does society permit? What do you say? Where do you stand?

The Woman Is Equal to the Man: "Back in the house" the disciples asked for more explanations. But Jesus did not explain rather He expounded His teaching to be more restrictive than that of the Pharisees by condemning divorce and remarriage out rightly as adultery, whereas the Pharisees allowed divorce remarriage. Jesus added a new crucial part to His teaching by including the condition of a possible divorce by a woman. Before now the woman was not permitted to divorce the man for any reason, including adultery. By this Jesus, explicitly teaches the equality of partners in marriage. The woman's right is no less than the men. The rib taken from the side of the man is a symbol of companionship, friendship, and equality.

Children Are Fruits of Marriage: Notice the easy flow from the debate on marriage to Jesus' blessing of children. Children certainly are gifts from the Lord and His blessings in marriage for couples who walk in His ways as we sing in the Psalm. Children are the physical manifestation of the oneness between the man and the woman in marriage. Children are gifted to free man from the "original solitude" to embrace his social status as a being-with-the-other. The gift of children affirms that procreation is the goal of marriage. To sustain marriage and indeed every human relationship, Jesus calls us to return to "the beginning" where we can find the right answers to our longings for authentic human relationships.

Dear friends, there is no perfect marriage. There are no perfect couples. We do not get married to perfect human beings, because we are not perfect ourselves. We have complaints against one another, we are disappointed by each other. Therefore, there are no healthy marriages without love demonstrated by sacrifices and forgiveness. Sacrifice and forgiveness, nay, true love is essential for our emotional health and spiritual growth. Our marriages crumble because we have left out the crucial and vital cord that should hold us together in the toughest of times. We think of marriage more in terms of comfort than sacrificial love. Marriage is a journey that we need to prepare with the baggage of fun and filth and be ready to embrace whichever comes with selfless fortitude and love. There is no easy way to any life-long endeavour. Our marriages and families can be spared so many pains, agonies, and traumas if we are determined to forgive, persevere, and love selflessly as Christ loves the Church. May God grant us the grace to do so.