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Homily Reflections – Gospel of Mark 10:2-16

Introduction: A Commitment is Tough

The very first verse of Chapter 10 of Mark's Gospel tells us that crowds gathered around Jesus, and he taught them – as was his custom in his public ministry. However, immediately, the Pharisees—the Jewish leaders—approach Jesus to test him and to undermine his authority and credibility. For he has quickly become a threat to their own authority. So, they question Jesus about the lawfulness of divorce – something that most people in the crowd would have seen or experienced within their own extended families.

Under specific conditions, divorce was an accepted practice among the Jewish people during the time of Jesus. It was regulated by the Law of Moses, which only permitted that a husband may divorce his wife if he finds her to be “indecent.” Notice that there was no comparable penalty for an “indecent” husband, which reflected the sexism of that time!

In reply, Jesus quotes from the Book of Genesis, and counters that God's original intention was that men and women would become one flesh in marriage. Jesus describes the teaching of Moses as a concession made to God's original intention because of human weakness. In brief, Mark tells us that Jesus quoted Genesis 2:24 (“the two shall become one flesh”) and contrasted its ideal of married one-ness with the bill of divorce that Moses allowed as a merciful concession to the “hardness of your hearts.”

According to contemporary biblical commentaries, the phrase, “hardness of your hearts,” does not indicate the commitment of a sin, but the failure to measure up to an ideal value and standard. So here, we may infer, Mark shows Jesus using this phrase to indicate a falling away from the ideal human state.

It is interesting to note that Jesus' words on marriage appear to be stricter

and less flexible than the present teaching of our Church. There are times when a Catholic marriage can be annulled if it lacks one of five elements before vows were exchanged: The spouses were free to marry; they freely exchanged their consent; they intended to marry for life, be faithful and be open to children; they intended “good of each other;” and their consent was given in the presence of witnesses before an authorized church official (priest/deacon).

At first glance, the final part of this Sunday’s Gospel seems unconnected to the previous teaching about divorce. However, when read together, these passages present a strong picture of Jesus’ emphasis on the importance of family. Among the purposes of marriage is the raising of children. Furthermore, by describing Jesus’ blessing of the children, Mark is highlighting that children are an example of trust and dependence upon God.

I would invite you to take time to read and ponder words from the *Gospel of Mark 10: 2-16*.

What word or words caught your attention?

What in this passage comforted/challenged you?

Further Questions and Reflections:

Jesus calls us back to the original vision that God has for creation. God sets out the ideal for marriage. Jesus says: “What God has joined together, let no one separate.” A high bar indeed!

How would you “rate” your marriage?

If a widow/widower, what do you miss about your spouse and your married life together?

Identify a time you made a promise or commitment to someone. What were the challenges?

Jesus’ teaching on marriage can be a joyful message to those who receive from God the wonderful gift of marital union, but a source of anguish for those whose attempt at marriage has failed. Pope Francis invites us “to be a sign of mercy wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy.”

How do you view divorcees or couples who struggle in their marriages?

How can/should you respond?

I am like a child in the arms of Jesus. I want to trust.

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