



Things to Ponder

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Martial Discipleship (Based on Mark 10:2-16)

By Rev. Msgr. Kevin T. Hart

The five primary reasons why married couples divorce are: infidelity, irreconcilable differences, mistreatment, desertion, and just growing tired of one another. For the Jews in the time of our Lord, the legality of divorce is attested to in the Mosaic Law, specifically in Deuteronomy 24: 1: “When a man, after marrying a woman and having relations with her, is later displeased with her because he finds in her something indecent, he writes out a bill of divorce and hands it to her, thus dismissing her from his house.”

The key word is “indecent.” There was much dissension among rabbis as to the exact interpretation of “indecent” and those interpretations gave rise to a number of reasons for which a man could divorce his wife (but not the other way around). For strict constructionalists, “indecent” refers only to adultery. More moderate rabbis held that “indecent” could also include some illness, especially leprosy, which would have rendered the wife “unclean.” Liberal rabbis held that “indecent” could include anything that displeased the husband, such as making bad chicken soup or soggy matzos.

It was this infighting among Jewish leaders that sets the stage for the Pharisees in today's Gospel to “trick” Jesus. Although they asked Him if it was legal for a man to divorce his wife, the real question was, “For what reasons may a man divorce his wife.” They were hoping that Jesus’ answer would thrust Him into the debate over “indecent” and make enemies of at least two camps of interpretation. Once again, Jesus refuses to take the bait. He bypasses the Mosaic Law and focuses on the primary scriptural text for marriage, Genesis 1:27 that reveals God’s two primary intentions for marriage, from which He quotes in today’s Gospel.

First, a marriage is between a man and a woman. Certainly, there was no question among the Pharisees on this point. Not so today as so called “same-sex marriage” is legally recognized. The term is an oxymoron, like a “square circle” or “non-binding commitment.” No one, no judge, no member of congress can overturn God’s law that marriage is between a man and a woman. Jesus makes this manifestly clear in today’s Gospel: “God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” Once again, as in the case of legalized abortion, we may have to confront the dichotomy that a law may be civilly legal and at the same time morally wrong when

that law is contrary to God's law. The fact that this Gospel passage concludes with Jesus' blessing little children is meant to show that the fruit of marriage is children, something no "same-sex marriage" can achieve.

God's second intention in creating marriage is that it is indissoluble. In a true marriage (and not every marriage recognized by the state or celebrated in the Church is a true marriage in the eyes of God) no power can separate what God has joined together. This is tough talk for the people of Jesus' time, for even His disciples drew Him apart to question Him on this matter. It's tough talk for our time as well.

The permanence of marriage is rooted in Jesus' understanding of the commitment He demands of anyone who would call himself or herself His disciple. Marriage between two baptized Christians is a sacrament because it is a concrete sign of God's commitment to us. Even though we may be unfaithful to Him, have seemingly irreconcilable differences with Him, treat others in a cruel and inhuman way, even though we desert Him and sometimes grow tired of Him and His commandments, God never breaks the bond of love by which He has committed Himself to us.

Marriage is the vocation in life that God has chosen for most people to live as His disciples. But married or not, divorced or single, today's Gospel urges us to be faithful to the commitments we have made, and through those commitments become His true disciples.

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