

✠ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and tested him, saying,

“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?”

He said in reply, “Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said,

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother

and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?

So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate.”

The Gospel of the Lord. R./ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

Commentary

As is commonplace in the Gospels, Jesus does not outright answer “Yes,” or “No” to a zinging question launched by the Pharisees. After all, they were trying to trip him up. Instead of a simple one word response, Jesus poses a question back. The Pharisees were experts on the law, and they should have easily known the passage from Genesis 2 that Jesus quotes. The first five chapters of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch, were the core of Jewish life during Jesus’ lifetime. Jesus does not comment on the lawfulness of divorce, at least not in civil terms. Rather, as he demonstrates a central element of his mission, Jesus raises the stakes to a divine and spiritual reality. He says that “what God has joined” those on earth must not separate. Marriage is a participation in the divine ordering of earthly activities.

This passage is the clearest expression of marriage in the Gospels (a parallel reading is found in Mark 10:2-9). It is the firm foundation for the Church’s teaching on the indissolubility of marriage. When selected for the wedding ritual, it will help to highlight the couple’s vows which are to last all the days of their lives.