Dear Friends

Creation, Marriage and the Mind of God

The readings of this weekend bring to forefront some of the burning issues of Jesus’ time and they are also very pertinent in our own time. All three readings taken together spells out the Creator’s plan for the world and human beings. At the same time these readings have been misinterpreted or distorted to fit the narratives of various groups with vested ideologies.

The creation story of the Genesis contains within it the beautiful and harmonious interrelationship of the creation with God as the center. By putting humanity at the top rung of creation with the privilege of ‘naming’ the creatures, God is entrusting the stewardship of his creation to an intelligent being who is only ‘just lower than the angels’. This is not dangerous anthropocentrism, distracting us from the biocentrism that the future of life on planet Earth demands. This story is about neither bio-nor anthropocentrism; it is about Theo-centricism. It is about the relationship among creatures that stems from our relationship with the Creator. We can never authoritatively speak about the care of the universe and human responsibility without reference to the Creator.

The creation story continues like a blockbuster script of intense scheming by a God who wants the outcome perfect. Please be attentive to the plot of the story! The other creatures were not enough for the Human (ha adam). Ha adam needs an equal, a real companion made of the same stuff. So, the original language—ishsha (woman) is made from isha (her man)—we lose the pun intended in translation into English. This is a story about how men and women were made for each other, not about who got the power. The ‘rib business’ is also a way of celebrating how the marital union—becoming ‘one flesh’—is a kind of recovery of a union that was meant to be from the beginning of humanity’s creation.

Jesus was consistent in every narrative in the Gospels about Marriage, that the Creator intended a ‘covenant relationship’ between man and woman and God. The words of Jesus in this Sunday’s Gospel pick up on the language from Genesis. The Pharisees, perhaps already aware of Jesus’ challenging teaching about the permanence of the marriage covenant, ask him to comment on the divorce statute in Deuteronomy: When a man, after marrying a woman and having relations with her, is later displeased with her because he finds in her something indecent (erwath dabar), and therefore he writes out a bill of divorce and hands it to her, thus dismissing her from his house (Deut. 24:1-4). The vagueness of the phrase “something indecent” as grounds for divorce had led some authorities to include reasons as frivolous as poor cooking.

Understood in this context, Jesus’ response can be heard as a defense of the women who suffered from this lenient interpretation of that law. He affirms the vision of the male/female relationship expressed in Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 and then confronts this abuse of women: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.” Jesus’ vision of marriage as a permanent covenant com-mitment comes not as a new stricture but as an affirmation of a relationship built into the original blessing of creation. So, if today you find yourself divorced, or alone, or left without your beloved because of death, or if your mate and you do not get along, what can you do? Do everything you can. Like the rest of us, you are trying to mirror in your life the loving unity of the Holy Trinity in whose image and likeness you are created. Pray and live it as best as you are able.

Be blessed, Fr. Tom Kunnel C.O.

October 3, 2021

27th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
FIRST READING
That is why a man leaves his father and mother
and clings to his wife,
and the two of them become one flesh.
(Gn 2:24)

PSALM
May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.
(Ps 128)

SECOND READING
He who consecrates and those who are
being consecrated
all have one origin. (Heb 2:11)

GOSPEL
“Therefore what God has joined together,
no human being must separate.” (Mk 10:9)


WORSHIP & MEDITATION

GOSPEL MEDITATION
Encourage Deeper Understanding of Scripture

Archbishop Fulton Sheen said, “It takes three to make love, not two: you, your spouse, and God.” Apart from the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, nothing speaks better of God’s incarnate love than marriage. God designed it this way. We place great value on love and rightly so. What we fail to realize, however, is that love, its very presence and place in our lives, is not simply part of the human package deal. Love comes from God. It is one of God’s greatest gifts to human beings. When we begin to realize that our very ability to love is sacred, it changes up how we see the essence of life, and purpose and sanctity of marriage.

God is love. It stands to reason then that if we follow the path of unconditional, self-emptying love we will then stumble upon God. It is precisely this intimate wedding of God with love that gives such eloquence and honor to the love between husband and wife. As a living sign of Christ’s love for the Church and for humanity, husbands and wives speak volumes of God’s unconditional incarnate love for all of his children! The Divine power that brings unity and life to marriage is so strong that once joined, it really cannot be separated.

Admittedly, marriage covenants can be extremely difficult to negotiate and, at times, very painful to experience. God’s perfect divinity always meets our broken and imperfect humanity. God is okay with this setup as he created it this way. Our loving is never as unconditional as God’s and often tainted by our own imperfections, needs, memories, hurts, sinfulness, and weakness. All of this baggage negatively impacts even the most well-intentioned marriages, causing them to be hurtful and empty. We are love works in progress. God can succeed in perfecting our love only if we keep our eyes fixed on him as the source of that love. That’s why marriage is always about three and not just two.

The Divine intimacy at the heart of marriage is what can make them celebrations of great union and happiness. Couples who are still madly in love with each other after many years, still looking at each other with that timeless twinkle in their eyes, best tell the story of God’s oneness with humanity. Honor, celebrate, and support those who have accepted a vocation to marriage. Living in a world that easily pulls relationships apart, may they find hope and inspiration from their faith companions who are on the same journey!
The first reading, Genesis 2:18-24, The creation story in chapter two of Genesis shows that the ancient Israelites knew the importance of man and woman being joined one to another. The woman is made of the rib of man, and, hence, she is literally “bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh.” Figuratively, “bone” stands for strength and “flesh” stands for weakness. Woman’s origin makes her one with man. God deliberately created man and woman to bond permanently with one another. The clearest expression of this bonding is found in the marriage of a man and woman and their co-creation, with God, of a child, making of the three a new family unit. Woman is found to be a “suitable partner” for man. That is why, God says, “a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife” with the result that, “the two of them become one flesh.” The Genesis text attributes two essential qualities to marriage: unity (the two shall become one) and complementarity or mutual interdependence. “The ancient Jewish term for marriage was kiddushin, a term that meant sanctification or consecration. Ordinarily, kiddushin signified the husband’s absolute consecration to his wife and of the wife to her husband. Each became an offering totally given to the other.” (William Barclay). Thus, the Jews had a high ideal of marriage and their rabbis taught: “the very altar sheds tears when a man divorces the wife of his youth.” But their practice was far from that ideal, and divorce was common and easy. The wife was considered to be a husband’s property with no legal rights whatsoever. So, Moses commanded the men at least to give the woman they were abandoning a certificate of divorce. So, Moses was trying to give women some protection and dignity in a society that had male favored justice.

The second reading, Hebrews 2:9-11 - Today we begin a course of six readings from the Letter to the Hebrews. A few words about our critical presuppositions in dealing with this document will therefore be in order. We would date it about 85 and regard it as written to Greek-speaking Jewish Christians in Italy (probably Rome). These addressees (1) form an esoteric group within the Church; (2) have stagnated instead of grown to Christian maturity. The writer copes with this situation by an elaborate exposition of the theme of Christ’s high priesthood, here used as the basis for a series of pep talks based on a typology of the Church as the “wandering people of God” (I). Just as the Israelites wandered in the wilderness between their departure from Egypt and their entry into the Promised Land, so the Christian community exists “between the times,” between the Christ-event and the second coming (Parousia).

Israel stagnated in the wilderness and was punished. How much worse will it be for the Christian community if it neglects an even greater salvation effected through the priestly work of Christ! In the readings of today and the next two Sundays, the author builds up the case for Jesus’ eschatological high priesthood. Although not of the tribe of Levi, Jesus has all the qualifications for the job, including the sharing of our common humanity. He and we have a common origin, and he calls us brothers and sisters (Heb 2:11).

GOSPEL INSIGHTS

Jesus’ prohibition of divorce here stands out dramatically for its sternness, which admits of no exceptions. It is interesting to note that Matthew’s parallel version (in Mt 19) adds the exception “except for unchastity/adultery” (v.9); Luke (in 16:18) does not include this exception. Jesus did not claim to introduce a new teaching, but reminded the Jews of the original intention of God. Citing the book of Genesis, Jesus proved that God made us male and female and commanded that “the two shall become one flesh,” then drew the conclusion, “they are no longer two, but one body” – partners with equal rights. The marriage relationship is God’s gift to us. It is God’s way of providing a lover, a helpmate, someone who will always be there for us. Hence, He declared that no man was allowed to separate what God had joined together (Mt 19:6). In contrast with the prevailing culture, Jesus presents man and woman as having equal rights and their marriage as essentially a permanent relationship. (“In creating men ‘male and female,’ God gives man and woman an equal personal dignity” CCC #2334). These words might have reminded the Pharisees of Yahweh’s warning given through his last prophet: “I hate divorce” (Malachi 2:16). Jesus also explains that Moses’ permission for divorce was only a temporary concession to control the growing rate of divorce even in his time, by introducing a law governing divorce. Jesus adds that it was because of the hardheartedness of the Jewish men that Moses allowed such a concession. (The Greek expression used, σκληροκαρδία, frequently means “stubbornness; obstinacy; refusal to be taught; insensitivity; persistent refusal to change one’s behavior.” Dr. Watson). By negating an interpretation of Dt 24:1-6 that allowed easy divorce, Jesus says, in effect, that where such a possibility of injustice and inequality exists in marriage, there can be no true marriage according to the intent of Genesis. According to the Mosaic sanction, men were allowed to divorce their wives, but wives were not able to divorce their husbands. By denying the man’s right to divorce, Jesus places the husband and wife on an equal footing in marriage and teaches that no Mosaic regulation dealing with a temporary situation can alter the permanency and unity of marriage, which God intended.
12 Rules for a happy marriage By Ann Landers
(Biblical references were later added by Tony’s Homilies)

1. Never both be angry at once (Proverbs 19:11)
2. Never yell at each other unless the house is on fire (Proverbs 21:23)
3. Yield to the wishes of the other as an exercise in self-discipline, if you can't think of a better reason (Col. 3:18-19; Ephesians 5:21)
4. If you have a choice between making yourself or your spouse look good—choose your spouse (Philippians 2:3-4; Matthew 19:19)
5. If you feel you must criticize, do so lovingly (Ephesians 4:15)
6. Never bring up a mistake of the past (Philippians 3:13-14)
7. Neglect the whole world rather than each other (Ephesians 5:25-31)
8. Never let the day end without saying at least one complimentary thing to your life partner (Proverbs 31:26)
9. Never meet without an affectionate greeting (Proverbs 5:18-19)
10. When you make a mistake, talk it out and ask for forgiveness (James 5:16)
11. Remember, it takes two to make an argument. The one who is wrong is the one who will be doing most of the talking (James 3:5-8)
12. Never go to bed mad (Ecclesiastes 7:9; Colossians 3:8).

CATHOLIC TEACHING ON MARRIAGE

Today’s reading from Mark’s Gospel, taken with Mt 5:31-32; Mt 19:3-9; Lk 16:18; and 1 Cor 7:10-11, is the main source from which the Catholic Church derives Jesus’ teaching on the Sacramental nature of marriage and its indissolubility. Christian marriage involves both a sacred and legal contract between a man and woman and at the same time is rooted in a special Covenant with the Lord. That is why Jesus states that a valid marriage is permanent. Hence, the Church has always firmly taught that a Sacramental marriage between Christians in which there has been true matrimonial consent and consummation, is absolutely indissoluble, except by the death of one of the spouses.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church summarizes the Church’s teaching: “Divorce is a grave offense against the natural law. It claims to break the contract, to which the spouses freely consented, to live with each other till death…… Divorce is immoral also because it introduces disorder into the family and into society. This disorder brings grave harm to the deserted spouse, to children traumatized by the separation of their parents and often torn between them, and because of its contagious effect which makes it truly a plague on society” (CCC #2384, 2385).

Pope St. John Paul II encourages families with the following plea: “Family, become what you are!” This echoes the Second Vatican Council, which calls the family, “the intimate community of life and love in which the partners are nourished spiritually and physically, accept one another as they are, and adjust to each other, deriving strength through prayer, the Word of God, the Sacrament, plus guidance and counseling…”