

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

GOSPEL

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Some Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, 'Is it against the law for a man to divorce his wife?' They were testing him. He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?' 'Moses allowed us' they said 'to draw up a writ of dismissal and so to divorce.' Then Jesus said to them, 'It was because you were so unteachable that he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. This is why a man must leave father and mother, and the two become one body. They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide.' Back in the house the disciples questioned him again about this, and he said to them, 'The man who divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another she is guilty of adultery too.'

People were bringing little children to him, for him to touch them. The disciples turned them away, but when Jesus saw this he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I tell you solemnly, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' Then he put his arms round them, laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing.

(Mark 10:2-16)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- In this text, Jesus is quoting from the Book of Genesis (Genesis 2:24), citing the second and earliest of the creation stories contained in the first two chapters of that book.
- Orthodox Jews believe that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Old Testament, known as the Pentateuch or the Torah, which means Law. Thus the designation of 'the Law of Moses'.
- In the New Testament world, both a husband and a wife could initiate divorce, but only for the gravest of reasons. This differs from the biblical Israelites, who had no law that allowed a woman to initiate divorce.
- This is one of the few gospel texts in which Jesus offers a direct teaching in opposition to that of Judaism at his time.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The major themes that have emerged from the gospel readings over the past few weeks are those of 'being receptive' and 'being of service'. One crucial human situation where both of these attitudes are vital is in the marriage relationship. At the time of Jesus, divorce was allowed under the Law of Moses (the Torah) but there were divided opinions. One school of thought held that divorce was only to be sanctioned in the case of the most serious moral misdemeanours on the part of the woman. Another held that any reason was good enough for a man to send away his wife. Jesus cuts through the legal arguments and goes back to the original plan of God as revealed at creation. One aspect of Jesus' answer that must have been surprising to his hearers is that he treats men and women as equals. They are drawn to become one flesh, and if either breaks this bond they are equally guilty. In an important sense, Jesus' prohibition on divorce can also be seen as a protection for women. At a time when the status of women was bestowed by their husband or their male offspring, a divorced woman was at the mercy of society. Jesus' understanding of marriage flows not from legality or social convention but from the intrinsic nature of man and woman and their role in God's plan.

- Look at the first reading from the Book of Genesis. Examine what this text says of the relationship between man and woman.
- Look at the second part of this gospel. What may Jesus have meant when he said, 'Anyone who does not welcome the kingdom like a little child will never enter it'?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Examine your own understanding of right relationship between men and women. In what ways is this teaching a challenge to modern attitudes to marriage?
- What threats to a Christian understanding of marriage currently exist? How do you feel about those?
- Put particular effort into your own marriage or a significant relationship this week. In what ways can your love for another become a present representation of the love of God for all people?
- Reflect on what makes for a successful marriage. What are the qualities that need to be cultivated to ensure that loving relationships are life-giving and sustaining for both partners? Are there significant relationships or marriages that have had an impact on your views of married love? How does this compare with what we see represented in popular culture? Share your insights together.
- Recite the gospel acclamation of the Mass this week:

