

## I page Synopsis: OT XXVII [B] (Oct 4) Homily on Mark 10: 2-16 (L-15)

**Introduction:** Today's Scripture readings are about the bond of love that marriage creates between a man and a woman, a bond that God wishes to be permanent. These readings challenge the spouses to practice the fidelity of their ever-faithful God, honoring their holy covenant commitment before Him.

**Scripture lessons:** The first reading from Genesis explains God's original plan concerning sex and marriage. It teaches us that God made man and woman for each other. Hence, in marriage they are no longer two but one, united by an unbreakable bond. The reading also describes the institution of marriage and shows that monogamy was God's intention from the very beginning. The Responsorial Psalm (Ps 90), expands the marital theme of the first reading and the Gospel to include the children born of the union. Since the children enrich the lives of their parents, the Psalmist prays: "*May you see your children's children.*" The second reading, taken from the Letter to the Hebrews, reminds us that Jesus became one of us, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. As one of us, he "tasted death for everyone." He was not only the Sacrifice, but also the High Priest. We are now his brothers and sisters, bonded with him, and through him bonded with God. Thus, Christ became the brother and Savior of all people – the good and the bad, the divorced, gays, lesbians -- everyone. Jesus' prohibition of divorce can be a source of suffering for those who face difficult married lives. Paul suggests that we have to accept pain as Jesus did, as the suffering we should endure on the way to glory. Today's Gospel gives Christ's explicit teaching on marriage and divorce, the Divine origin of marriage, the sacredness of family life and the indissolubility of marriage. These are difficult messages to preach in a society that embraces co-habitation and ignores both the escalating divorce statistics and the dangerous consequences of divorce. The Gospel teaches that family life is sacred, that husband and wife are partners with equal rights and that the destruction of the family by divorce will result in the destruction of society.

**Life Messages:** 1) The spouses need to work hard to create a good marriage: Marriage demands that they should become the right persons for each another. Marriage is a union based on committed sharing and forgiving, sacrificial *agape*-love. It requires a lot of mutual adjustments, generosity and good will to forgive and ask for forgiveness, sincere cooperation in training children and raising them as practising Catholic Christians and daily strength from God obtained through personal and family prayers and punctual participation in the parish liturgy.

2) We need to reach out with Christian sympathy to the divorced and problem families. The parish community needs to accept them with respect, compassion, sensitivity, love and support, sharing the depth of their pain from a failed marriage. The Church cannot sanction remarriage unless the previous marriage was declared annulled by the diocesan marriage tribunal. "They should be encouraged to listen to the Word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to bring up their children in the Christian faith..." (CCC #1651).

O.T. XXVII (10/4/2015)-Gn 2:18-24; Heb 2: 9-11; Mk 10: 2-16 [2-12]

**Anecdote: # 1:** The grim picture presented by divorce statistics. We are told that during the last three years the divorce rate in the U.S has gone above 43%, although it is still less than that in Russia (65%), Sweden (63%), U.K (49%) and Australia (49%). In 1998 there were 19.4 million divorced adults in the U.S.A. Each year 2.5 million more couples get divorced. A greater number of divorces occur within the Christian churches than in marriages made outside the Church. An ABC broadcast reports that the divorce rate in the "Bible Belt" is 50% higher than in other areas of the country. This affects the lives of one million new children every year, 84% of whom live in single parent homes. Statistics for the U.S.

predict the possibility of 40% to 50% of marriages ending in divorce if current trends continue. People between the ages of 25 and 39 account for 60% of all divorces. More people are in their 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage than 1<sup>st</sup> (www. dicorcenter.com). With divorce being so common today, nearly half of all marriages end in divorce.

#2: Divorce a curse on children: Today divorce is at an all-time high, and there are more lives shattered by it than can ever be documented or calculated. There is hardly a child or a family in the advanced countries that hasn't been touched by the pain of divorce in one way or another. Judith S. Wallerstein, Sandra Blakeslee, & Julia M. Lewis state in their book: *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: a 25 Year Landmark Study*: "... children of divorce have a very hard time growing up. They never recover from their parents' breakups and have difficulty forming their own adult relationships." In *How Now Shall We Live?* Chuck Colson (A [Special Counsel](#) to [President Richard Nixon](#) from 1969 to 1973 and later, after his release from prison, a noted [Evangelical Christian](#) leader and cultural commentator), notes some disturbing realities that plague children who grow up without a father: a) Children of single-parent families are five times more likely to be poor because half the single mothers in the United States live below the poverty line. b) Children of divorced parents suffer intense grief and other mental problems requiring psychological help. c) Children from disrupted families have more academic and behavioral problems at school and are nearly twice as likely to drop out of high school. d) Girls in single-parent homes are at a much greater risk for being sexually precocious, and are more likely to have a child out of wedlock. e) Crime and substance abuse are strongly linked to fatherless households. f) Statistics show that 60 percent of rapists grew up in fatherless homes, as did 72 percent of adolescent murderers, and 70 percent of all long-term prison inmates. In fact, most of the social problems disrupting American life today can be traced to divorce. Today's Gospel contains Jesus' clear teaching on marriage and divorce.

Introduction: Today's Scripture readings are about the bond of love that marriage creates between a man and a woman, a bond that God wishes to be permanent. They challenge the spouses to practice the fidelity of their ever-faithful God. The first reading, taken from Genesis, explains God's original plan concerning sex and marriage. It teaches us that God made man and woman for each other. Hence, in marriage they are no longer two but one, united by an unbreakable bond. The reading also describes the institution of marriage and shows that monogamy was God's intention from the very beginning. The Responsorial Psalm expands the marital theme of the first reading and the Gospel to include the children born of the union. Since the children enrich the lives of their parents, the Psalmist prays: "*May you see your children's children.*" The second reading, taken from Hebrews, reminds us that Jesus became one of us, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. As one of us, he "tasted death for everyone." He was not only the Sacrifice, but also the High Priest. We are now his brothers and sisters, bonded with him and through him bonded with God. Thus, Christ became the brother and Savior of all people – the good and the bad, the divorced, gays, lesbians -- everyone. Jesus' prohibition of divorce can be a source of suffering for those who face difficult married lives. Paul suggests that we have to accept that pain as Jesus did, as the suffering we should endure on the way to glory. Today's Gospel gives Christ's explicit teaching on marriage and divorce, the Divine origin of marriage, the sacredness of family life and the indissolubility of marriage. These are difficult messages to preach in a society that embraces co-habitation and ignores both the escalating divorce statistics and divorce's dangerous consequences. The Gospel teaches that family life is sacred, that husband and wife are partners with equal rights and that the destruction of the family by divorce will result in the destruction of society.

**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 "*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. They are bonded in God's deliberate creation of them. The clearest expression of this bonding is found in the marriage of a man and woman and their co-creation, with God, of 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 theme of marital bonding, which is essential for human fulfillment and happiness in marriage and families, appears in both the first reading and today's Gospel and explains Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce. Divorce reveals an absence of marital bonding.

**The second reading (Hebrews 2: 9-11):** The Letter to the Hebrews is a sermon which explains the meaning of the early Christian confession that Christ died for us and our sins. It presents Christ as the great High Priest who has willingly offered himself on our behalf. He is both the perfect Sacrifice and the Priest who offers it. Today's passage from Hebrews says that, by the grace of God, Jesus tasted death for us all, that he was our leader on the way to salvation and that we are now his brothers and sisters. Christ was thus "perfect" for fulfilling the task of bringing us into a new relationship with God in which we may now approach God with confidence and even boldness. Christ became the brother and Savior of all people – the good and the bad, the divorced, gays, lesbians – everyone. Jesus' prohibition of divorce can be a source of suffering for those who experience difficult married lives. But Paul suggests that we have to accept pain the way Jesus did, as the suffering we should endure on the way to glory.

The context: King Herod had married his brother's wife, Herodias, violating the Mosaic Law. John the Baptist showed courage in condemning the king in public and lost his head for it. In today's Gospel the Pharisees were setting a trap for Jesus, asking whether he agreed with his cousin John on the non-legitimacy of divorce. They were trying to trick him, to see if he would criticize the Mosaic tradition and alienate the people. But Jesus used the occasion to declare unequivocally that the bond of marriage comes from God, not man, and that it is permanent and indissoluble: "*What God has joined, man must not separate*".

High ideal and low practice: 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. 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 which stated: "She is not my wife and I am not her husband." He would give this paper to his wife and tell her to leave. They were then legally divorced. That way she would at least be free to remarry. Without that certificate, technically she was still the property of her former husband. So Moses was trying in a small way to give women some protection. There were two interpretations prevalent in Jewish theological schools concerning the Mosaic Law on divorce by which Moses allowed divorce when the husband found "some indecency" in his wife. "*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*" (Deuteronomy 24:1). The Shammai School interpreted "indecency" as adultery, while the Hillel School interpreted it as anything which the husband did not like in his wife's word, behavior, actions, or even her appearance.

Jesus' stand: Jesus did not claim to introduce a new teaching. He reminded the Jews that his doctrine went back to 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*." He then drew the conclusion that "*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 hard-heartedness of the Jewish men that Moses allowed such a concession. 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.

The Catholic teaching: Today's reading from Mark's Gospel, taken with Mt. 5:31-32; Mt. 19:3-9; Luke. 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).

Stability in Marriage: Of course, it is not always easy for the two partners in a marriage to get along with each other. The husband and wife bring to the marriage their strengths and weaknesses, loves and hates, hurts and wounds, hopes and fears. Hence, the first requisite for a lasting marriage is that the spouses learn to accept each other as they are: two imperfect and vulnerable human beings. They are God's gift to each other: "*I will make a suitable partner for him.*" They must learn that healing the wounds of family life is as necessary as healing the wounds in the body. In *Familiaris Consortio* (n. 17), 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..." When the marriage relationship breaks down and reconciliation is not possible, the Church recognizes the right of the couple to separate and live apart permanently. If divorced Catholics then enter into a civil marriage, they are allowed to receive Eucharistic Communion only if they refrain from sexual relations.

Life messages: 1) The spouses need to work hard to create a good marriage: Marriage demands that they should become the right person for each another. It means a union based on committed, sharing and forgiving, sacrificial *agape*-love. It requires a lot of mutual adjustments, generosity and good will to forgive and ask for forgiveness, sincere cooperation in training children and raising them as practising Catholic Christians and daily strength from God obtained through personal and family prayers and punctual participation in the parish liturgy.

2) We need to reach out with Christian sympathy to the divorced and problem families. There must be compassion, and a challenge to sin no more. Those who are divorced must be taught that God has not abandoned them. The parish community needs to accept them with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. It is the duty of the Christian community to love and support them. We must reach out to those who have been hurt by bad marriages. We may not realize the depth of their pain, but we must be aware of our own frailty. Those who are divorced and remarried must not be excluded from our community. While the Church cannot sanction remarriage unless the previous marriage was declared annulled by the diocesan marriage tribunal, we must make it clear that the church is not issuing a condemnation. "They should be encouraged to listen to the Word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts for justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace" (CCC #1651). *The National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States* says: "Divorced persons and their children should be welcomed by the parish community

and made to feel truly a part of parish life. Catechesis of the Church's teaching on the consequences of remarriage after divorce is not only necessary, but will be supportive for the divorced" (No. 131).

3) We need to be aware of the dangers of cohabitation. According to the *National Fatherhood Initiative*, the rates of depression are three times higher for cohabiting couples than they are for married couples. Cohabiting men and women reported significantly more alcohol problems than married or single men and women. Cohabiting unions have more disagreements, fight more often and report lower levels of happiness than their married counterparts. Male aggression is twice as common among cohabiting couples as it is among married partners. Hence, parents must make sure that children understand that cohabitation is morally evil and not an innocent option for fun.

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