

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 7, 2018 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the Word He wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Loving Creator, you created men and women to be your partners in creation and to love one another. Teach us how to live in harmony with each other. Free us from all hardness of heart that blocks us from understanding and embracing your ways. This we pray through Christ Our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week. Did the Word impact your thinking and/or behavior? Did change occur and how was it?*

Facilitator: For the past several weeks, Mark has been giving us lessons on the *true nature of Christian discipleship*. This week, we receive a *fifth lesson* which has to do with the permanent and exclusive nature of marriage, and of “hardness of heart” which is a big obstacle to all seeking union in marriage. The first reading speaks of God’s original plan for marriage. The Gospel touches on “hardness of heart” which can lead to the break-up of a marriage. Jesus also speaks about the dignity of children in God’s kingdom. The second reading speaks about Jesus’ solidarity with the human race and how his saving death made us children of God. For individuals who have gone through a divorce and/or remarriage, today’s Gospel may be a painful one to listen to. It is good for us to remember that in his Gospel, Jesus presents us with many difficult challenges which none of us live *perfectly*. Hence, all of us are always in need of God’s mercy for the failures in our lives.

Let us listen to God’s Word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a Word, you may want to write it down to remember.

Read the assigned Scripture readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading especially if participants have not done so prior to the meeting.

FIRST READING: Genesis 2:18-24

In Genesis 1-2, we find *two accounts* of the creation of man and woman and the institution of marriage. The first account stresses the *procreative* dimension of marital love while the second—which we hear today—stresses the *unitive* dimension: man’s need for a companion who will be his partner in life.

The reading begins by stating the need we have for human companionship: “*It is not good for man to be alone.*” None of the lovely animals are found to be suitable partners for the man whom God made in his image and likeness. So God casts the man into a deep sleep, takes a rib from his side and creates a woman—one who is both like and different from the man. For many centuries, this creation story has been used to point out the inferiority of women to men. This, unfortunately, is a wrong interpretation of the story. The woman may have been created from a part of man but he had no part in her creation nor did he even witness it. Like the man, she is brought forth by a deliberate and unique act of God. Both are equal in the

eyes of God and given to each to be companions and partners in life’s journey. “Bone of my bone” and “flesh of my flesh” is a poetic way of expressing the male and female’s physical and psychological attraction to each other. The final verse of the reading is a reference to the divine institution of marriage, a union characterized by *permanency and exclusivity*.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 128

This Psalm highlights the notion of blessings that find their origin in God. It speaks about the blessing of labor, family life and, finally, God’s blessing on Zion (Jerusalem), which will be a peaceful land where one can see “your children’s children.” Against the background of the Genesis story of creation, the Psalm focuses on divine blessings and reminds us that marriage and family life rank high among the many gifts that come to us from the hand of the Creator.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 2:9-11

For the next seven weeks, the second reading will be excerpts from the Epistle to the Hebrews. In an introductory note to this Epistle, Patricia Sanchez writes:

The author of this theological Epistle was writing to Greek-speaking Christians living in exile, who had grown weary with the demands of their Christian commitment. To bolster their faith, the writer presents them with a deep theological portrait of Jesus, as the High Priest of a New Covenant, the sacrifice of which had redeemed all of sinful humankind and forever obviated every other priest-hood covenant and sacrifice.

The ancient writer underlines the *solidarity* that exists between Jesus and his followers. By virtue of his Incarnation, Jesus so unites himself to the human condition that he becomes one with all who suffer. Jesus suffers for the sake of all and even experiences the ultimate human crisis—death. For “a little while,” the eternal son becomes part of time and space to bring about the redemption of all peoples. By so doing, all the redeemed are free to enter by faith into solidarity with Jesus as brothers and sisters of the one Father.

PROCLAMATION GOSPEL: Mark 10:2-16

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to write down the Word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL COMMENTARY: Mark 10:2-16

Let us now read the Gospel commentary privately.

This is Mark’s *fifth lesson on discipleship* focusing on the “hardness of heart” which prevents two disciples from remaining married.

The Pharisees are asking Jesus a question on whether it is permissible for a man to divorce his wife. They want to see if Jesus will contradict Moses’ “pastoral solution.” As a concession to human weakness and sin (another word for “hardness of heart”), Moses permitted the Israelites to divorce (Deut. 24:1-4). But then Jesus points the Pharisees back to God’s *original*

intention for marriage, namely, that two people, especially two *disciples*, shall remain married until death do them part: “*What God has joined together, no human being must separate.*” By teaching this, Jesus is raising the status of women as equal to men. In Jewish law, women are always the victim since they cannot ask for a divorce, whereas men can seek a divorce for the smallest of reasons. In the Kingdom that Jesus is inaugurating, men and women are to be treated as *equal* and they are to treat each other as *partners*. This is a very radical new teaching in Jesus’ time. In Mark’s Gospel, no exception to Jesus’ teaching is mentioned. However, by the time Matthew’s Gospel is written, the church evidently has begun to make some exceptions (see Matt 19:9).

In verses 13-16, Jesus also seeks to *raise the status of children* in a society in which they too have no legal rights. Jesus tells his listeners that children, like women, must be treated with dignity and respect, and that their religious training is to be taken seriously. Secondly, children’s attitude of *openness* and *receptivity* to Jesus is held up as something to be emulated by adults. (As Jesus spoke these words, one must have heard the “Wow!” Afterwards, down at the pub or coffee shop, the conversation must have been very interesting as the folks buzzed about what Jesus had said about marriage, divorce, women and children.)

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse in the Gospel caught your attention. Why?

**Share the next questions in small groups
of 2 or 3 or with the whole group.**

2. In the home and Church environment you grew up in, did you get the message that women were equal to men? Or did you receive subtle or not-so-subtle hints that men were more important or superior to women?

3. When you personally experience “hardness of heart,” what are you feeling? What helps you most to move past the “hardness of heart” feeling?

4. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks about marriage, divorce and remarriage. What can our Church or parish do to:

- strengthen marriages?
- bring comfort and consolation to the divorced?
- show mercy to divorced Catholics who have remarried outside the Church?

5. If *both* husband and wife are committed disciples of Jesus, divorce will never occur. Agree? Disagree? Why?

6. What is the one thing Jesus is saying to us in this Sunday's Gospel about how a disciple should speak or act? And what do you need to do or change to be a better disciple?

JOURNALING: *Having listened to the Word of God, let us now take some quiet moments to write down what is coming to us. What are you hearing God say to you? Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. Go wherever the Spirit leads you.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of this Sunday's Gospel. Suggestion: If you are carrying a "hardened heart" about some relationship, plan this week to take practical steps to work with Jesus to create a new heart. Pray Psalm 51.

SHARE PRAYER RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD

Share a prayer, however brief, on the Gospel you have just heard, discussed and journaled about. For example: If married: *Lord, help me to see my spouse truly as your gift and my own flesh—OR—Lord, help me to see my own children and all children as your gift, and open my eyes to see all of life with their wonder and awe.* In other words, the prayer at this time should flow from the readings. (Consider standing in a circle and hold hands.)

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Let us now share personal prayers of petition (prayers for self) and intercession (prayers for others).

Pray for all engaged and married couples, especially those who are struggling. Pray for couples going through a divorce at this time. Pray for all who feel excluded from the Church because of their marital situation.

CONCLUDE WITH A SONG©