

Bible Study

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle B

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “We praise you, O Lord our God. All truth is from you, for you alone are the source of wisdom. Give us the joy of hearing your voice in the words we read today and send upon us the peace of tasting the depth of your goodness. May our reflections lead us to know you better and to love you more. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Focusing Questions

1. How did God bless you through another person this week?
2. What are some of the things about children that truly delight you?

Commentary before the First Reading: Genesis 2:18-24

This reading was chosen for this Sunday because Jesus quotes the last verse of it in today’s Gospel account. It is the older of the 2 creation stories that begin the Hebrew Scriptures. It depicts God as creating the universe one handful at a time, like a potter. Although not *historically* accurate, this story (like the other in Genesis 1) was one of the ways that Jewish elders taught the Truth about several important doctrines of the Jewish faith. It is also foundational in our Catholic understanding of marriage as a sacrament.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Which verse of the reading supports the belief that humans were intended to have control over and make use of non-human creatures? Does that give us the right to do anything we wish with those creatures?
2. What might be the intended symbolism of God creating the woman out of a rib, rather than out of dirt as he did the man and all of the animals; what was that detail supposed to teach?
3. Which verse supports the belief that men and women complement each other – that is, neither one is complete without the other?
4. Which verse supports the belief that God approves of the physical union between husband and wife (that sex is not “dirty”), and that God intended their union to be both for their benefit and for the good of humankind?
5. State other Truths about God which can be taught by use of this story.

Commentary before the Second Reading: Hebrews 2:9-11

Today we begin a series of readings from the letter to the Hebrews, a series that will take us all the way to the Solemnity of Christ the King at the end of the liturgical year. We do not know who the author of the letter is; however, it quickly becomes clear that the author is a scholar. A significant portion of the letter is an attempt to understand the Truth that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. The author also encouraged early Christians not to become lax in their faith or to begin taking it for granted. They have been entrusted with a great treasure of Truth about God – wise words for us, as well.

Read the Second Reading aloud, beginning in the middle of verse 9, “he suffered....”

1. Who is the “he” referred to in the first verse of the reading?
2. Which psalm is being quoted in that verse?
3. Find the words that refer to our belief that Jesus, as God Eternal, was present even at creation of the universe, at the beginning of time as we know it.
4. Which words refer to the purpose for Jesus’ taking on human life, suffering, dying, and rising?
5. Which event in Jesus’ life consecrated those who were to be called his brothers and sisters?
6. What must each of us do in order to share in that consecration as adopted sons and daughters of God?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Mark 10:2-16

Divorce was permitted in Jewish society at the time of Jesus. Since a wife had come to be regarded as an extension of the husband’s property, he could give her a written statement that she was no longer wanted as his wife and the union was terminated. The dilemma proposed by the Pharisees was based on their awareness that this practice contradicted what we heard in the First Reading, even though it had been granted to them by the great, holy prophet Moses. Jesus did what we should do when presented with a moral dilemma: ask what God wishes.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Speak the verse that stood out for you in this reading. Comment if you wish.

2. Why did Moses decide to permit the giving of a bill of divorce?
3. On what grounds might God (and the Church) NOT consider to be adultery for a person to divorce his/her spouse and marry another person? (see verse 9)
4. What, then, is the direct answer to the Pharisees' question as stated in verse 2?
5. Which verse raises the Christian belief that God intended marriage to be for the security and well-being of children? (Note: this was also a somewhat bold statement for Jesus to make about the culture of his society, which had sadly come to consider children as property more than as persons having dignity.)
6. What does it mean to accept the kingdom of God (that is, God's standards and value system) in the same way that one accepts a child? How is that connected to Jesus' teaching about the sanctity of marriage?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. The Jewish mindset does not separate *body* from *soul*; in their way of thinking, when a man and a woman become "one flesh," they become *one being*. Could that be what God intended marriage to be? How well can that be lived out in reality?
2. To what extent does that concept differ from the mindset of our own society?
3. What aspect of holy marriage does a couple miss when they choose just to live together as lovers?
4. How can praying together, faith sharing (talking about our beliefs and about God's activity in our lives), a common value system, and Christian service help a husband and wife to cultivate a deeper relationship with God and with each other? Be as practical and specific as possible.
5. If you are or have been married, can you point to a time when God blessed you in a surprising way through your spouse instead of blessing you directly?
6. In light of the debate over same sex unions, how would you apply these readings to that debate in a way that is both theologically accurate and at the same time not judgmental or condemning?
7. Which 5 words in the Gospel are the basis for an annulment, an official declaration by the Church that a legal marriage was never a sacramental union in which God was a partner? How is that different from a divorce?

Closing Prayer (from the Ritual Mass for a Wedding)

"God our Father, when you created humankind, you willed that a man and a woman should become one as husband and wife. You then made the bond of marriage a holy mystery, a symbol of Christ's love for his Church. May the lives of all married and engaged couples bear witness to the reality of that love. Bless them and assist them all the days of their lives. Amen"

(Sign of the Cross)