

FATHER MARK SCHULTE HOMILY
Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
October 3, 2021
“Until Death Do Us Part”

Of all the sacred books of the Bible (73 books) perhaps the two books shunned by many believers the most are the Book of Genesis and the Book of Revelation. They perhaps see these two books as being enigmatic and too difficult to understand. They perhaps say to themselves, “I will just focus on the four gospels because these contain the words of Jesus himself. The rest is just so much history and symbolism. Most of which is difficult for me to relate to.”

This way of thinking is most unfortunate because the Book of Genesis and the Book of Revelation are like bookends to one big story of salvation history. The Book of Genesis introduces the story of salvation and sets the stage with essential doctrine which carries throughout the entire Bible. The doctrines of original sin and the Sacrament of Marriage (a Divine Institution) to name just two (CCC 385-412, 1602). The Book of Revelation contains among other things the goal of the Christian believer, participation in the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:7) (CCC 1602, 1612). Without these bookends, the books fall down. When reading a book, we don't skip the first three chapters or the last three.

I mention all of the above as a way of introducing today's Gospel passage of which the subject of marriage is a very important part (Mk 10:2-16). And in the Gospel, Jesus will make a direct reference to the very first chapters of the book of Genesis. And in doing so, Jesus will ratify the voracity and importance of this first book of the Bible. This means that you and I should not ignore this book of Genesis.

In the Gospel, the conniving Pharisees confront Jesus with a sensitive question in order to trap him in the hope of condemning him. “Is it ok for a man to divorce his wife”? After all, Moses permitted a man to give a decree of divorce to his wife, they said. They cite Moses because they are hoping that Jesus will contradict Moses – perhaps the most venerated figure of the Old Testament. Contradict him and you essentially condemn yourself. Jesus said: “Moses permitted divorce because the people's hearts were hard and they pestered Moses until he permitted divorce.”

Now here is the reference to Genesis: Jesus said, “In the beginning it was not that way... At the time of creation God made them male and female... The man leaves his father and mother, is joined to his wife and the two become one; one flesh... Therefore let no one separate what God has joined”. (Mk 10:6-9) (Gn 1:27; 2:24).

Jesus is telling them that God intended for the man and woman to unite as one. And no man (or man-made institution) should separate what God has intended and joined. The coming together of a man and woman in unity is a divinely intended act. Don't mess with a divinely intended act. If you do, you are messing with Almighty God. Not a wise thing to do.

The disciples who are products of their culture are just as amazed as the Pharisees about this teaching and they question Jesus about it (CCC 1615). Jesus tells them that, “The man or woman that divorces their spouse and marries another commits adultery.” This is significant because adultery was technically a stoning offense in the Mosaic law. Thus, Jesus lends supreme gravity to the offense of divorce and remarriage. In the New Testament the penalty is not stoning but instead the risk of damnation for the unrepentant adulterer, for adultery is a mortal sin (CCC 2380). And He indicates that divorce itself does not end the marriage because adultery applies to a married person (CCC 2384).

Jesus establishes the Sacrament of Matrimony at the Wedding Feast of Cana by his presence there and by performing at the request of His mother, His first public miracle – the changing of water into wine (CCC 1613) (Jn 2:1-7)).

In today's Gospel, Jesus confirms the divine institution of marriage and restores its original dignity as God the creator intended and in doing so, He refers all the way back to the beginning with Adam and Eve, the first divinely instituted groom and bride (CCC 1614).

The Catholic Church has always promoted and vigorously defended the divine institution of marriage and family. Marriage and family form the very foundation of the church and society (CCC 2207). If marriage and family life is healthy, then the church and the society she inhabits will be healthy and holy. This is just what God intended from the "beginning".

But as is so often the case, sin enters into the equation. Men and women are weak, they fall into sin, and sin damages a relationship, a marriage. Just like it did in the beginning with Adam and Eve (Gn 3:1-7).

Divorce is not the solution as Jesus reminds the Pharisees and us. Faithfulness, holiness, and a willingness to live within God's naturally established order is the only solution (CCC 1603).

Jesus showed us the way regarding faithfulness and holiness. Jesus is the divine bridegroom of His Church for which He gave His life. Self-sacrifice is the way to longevity in a marital relationship. In order to support God's institution of marriage, societies must adhere to God's naturally established order for marriage: one man, one woman united for life, open to the gift of children (CCC 2202).

The devil knows how important healthy marriages are for raising holy souls to God and so he does all that he can to weaken the institution of marriage through:

- Encouraging stubbornness and hardness of hearts.
- Adultery, fornication, cohabitation, contraception.
- The attempt to form same sex unions.
- Artificial forms of conception (petri dish et.al.).
- Divorce and remarriage without annulment.
- Pornography, self-abuse, prostitution, homosexuality.

The Church has always vigorously opposed these sinful practices – because they are spiritually damaging to the individual and are detrimental to families and well-ordered societies.

As the faithful, we must do all we can to defend and support marriage and the family.

- Encourage our young people to commit themselves to authentic marriage.
- Resist unlawful marriage ceremonies.
- Encourage those who are suffering through a divorce to stay close to their parish family for support and to receive the Eucharist worthily. The devil wants to separate divorced people from the Eucharist.
- Teach your children the true meaning of marriage.
- Come to the Mass as a family.

Authentic marriage is beautiful when it reflects Christ and His Church (CCC 1616-1617).

NOTE: CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church