

REFLECTION FOR 27TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME YEAR B

Genesis 2:18-24 Hebrews 2:9-11 Mark 10:2-16

Today's readings touch on marriage and a very sensitive issue, the issue of divorce.

Getting married is easy. Being married takes hard work.

Getting into the car and driving home from the hospital with your new-born child is easy. Being a parent takes hard work.

Getting baptised is easy. Being a Christian takes hard work.

Weddings are beautiful. It is easy to say 'yes' when you are surrounded by beauty, laughter, music and people who want nothing but the best for you. You can't believe that the person saying 'yes' to you loves you this much.

It's easy to get married. But... being married... that takes work.

Saying 'yes' at the altar is easy... then you realize that your 'yes' will cost you something. It will cost you everything.

Once you're married, every decision you make is no longer about you, it is about 'we'. You can no longer ask: Is this good for me? You have to ask: is it good for us?

Being married requires talking through the hard stuff, putting the other first, stripping away selfishness.

Being married requires the hard work of communication and adapting to differences.

Being married requires forgiveness, and patience, then more forgiveness, then more patience...

Being married is hard work! Some days you may ask, 'why are we still trying?' But then you meet a couple who've been doing the hard work of marriage for 20, 40, 50, 60 years. And you look at them and say, "that is beautiful. They are beautiful. Their marriage is beautiful."

I hope that we all know at least a few couples who inspire us. The couples who have paid the price, who have carried the cross, who have learned the hard lessons... and there, they are, still married. Not just getting by; but thriving.

In their love, you catch a glimpse of God's love. In their forgiveness, you catch a glimpse of God's forgiveness. In their patience and faithfulness, God is showing you something that cannot be learned anywhere else.

Thank God for the couples who say 'yes,' and then live their 'yes.' Thank God for the ones who understand that love isn't easy, but love is the one thing that makes life worth living.

Their good example inspires us.

When the Pharisees approached Jesus in today's Gospel with their question about marriage and divorce, they were not seeking to inspire anyone. They were trying to trap Jesus. They want him to say the wrong thing so that they can accuse him.

They ask – “is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” They already know that the Book of Deuteronomy permitted divorce. They’re trying to trap Jesus.

So Jesus reminds them – then and now – about God’s original intentions for marriage. He speaks of God’s beautiful plan for married love, what a gift this love can be, if we are willing to work at it.

It’s what we heard in the first reading. God made us male and female. And when you meet the one whom God intends for you, you experience joy in their presence, in the love that makes our hearts burst.

You look at the one you love and realize, “This person knows me better than anyone else, yet they love me in a way I don’t deserve.” And you cannot imagine your future without the person in it.

And in that moment, you understand what Genesis says: God has made the two of you one. So, you decide to say ‘yes’ to God’s plan.

God takes marriage seriously. For so many of us, our deepest fulfilment is found when we stand before the altar, and say ‘yes’ to each other, and ‘yes’ to God.

Jesus reminds his listeners that this is God’s plan. Jesus wants us to remember the couples whose marriages have inspired us. Jesus reminds us of this, because it is so easy for us to take each other for granted. When we take each other for granted, we withdraw, we hold grudges, we keep scores, we stop communicating and our hearts head in different directions.

I don’t think that any man or woman who has stood before an altar ever plans to get a divorce. I don’t think that men and women enter into marriage thinking that they will be the ones who will walk away. And yet, divorce happens in every family.

Divorce is painful for all people: the couple themselves and their family.

Jesus first instinct is to inspire us by reminding us of God’s dream for every marriage. Hold on to the dream that you had on the day of your wedding. Treasure the example of the men and women whose marriage inspires you. In the busyness of life, it is easy to forget why you said ‘yes’ in the first place.

The ‘two become one.’ This is God’s plan – and it is beautiful when we see it lived well.

Still, why does Jesus use such harsh language? He says that those who divorce and remarry commit adultery.

In some ways, this hard language is Jesus’s way of telling us that God takes marriage seriously, and God takes divorce seriously. I think Jesus is inviting us to do whatever is humanly possible to stay faithful to our vows.

Still, if this were the only time Jesus ever spoke about ‘adultery,’ you might be justified in thinking that he sounds pretty harsh.

But let's not forget that in chapter 8th of John's Gospel, the religious leaders drag a woman before Jesus. And what has she done? She committed adultery!

The religious leaders all have stones in their hands. The law said that a woman caught in adultery should be stoned to death.

What does Jesus do? He says, "Let the one without sin cast the first stone." And quickly, every stone is dropped, and every accuser disappears.

What does Jesus say to the woman who committed adultery? He says, "Woman, I do not condemn you. You're forgiven. Now go, and don't sin anymore."

Do you hear that? This woman was caught in adultery, but Jesus' response is not condemnation – it is mercy, forgiveness, and the desire to help her move forward with strength, and hope, and integrity.

It is the duty of the Christian community to reach out to those who have been hurt by bad marriages and to support them

Without love we are doomed. With love we can become saints in any vocation.

Fr Patrick