

THE EMMAUS SERIES

27th Sunday Year B

Genesis 2:18-24

Hebrews 2:9-11

Mark 10:2-16

The two become one body

The Church's liturgy is our great teacher. As it weeks pass it reviews the great issues of our existence, and the Word of God points the way forward. In today's world, marriage is in crisis, and the break-up of families leaves many young people seriously deprived in their formative years. Without the guidance of Christ we would be at a loss to find the truth that should guide us. In today's reading from Mark, Jesus is asked whether divorce was permissible. In the time of Jesus, although divorce was permitted (see Deut 24: 1-4) the proper grounds for divorce were debated. Jesus bypasses this debate, and speaks of what marriage is in the plan of the Creator – 'in the beginning'. Citing today's first reading from Genesis, he makes the startling assertion that true marriage is more than an arrangement entered into by two human persons; it involves God – 'What God has united, man must not divide'.

One of Pope John Paul II's contributions to the Church's life was his series of addresses on human love and sexuality, given at his weekly audiences (1979-1984). Explaining how it is that Jesus can make such an assertion, he interprets today's reading from Genesis. This seemingly simple text speaks with great depth and subtlety of what it means to be human. The solitude of Adam, finds no companion in the animal kingdom - because, made in the image of God, Adam has in him a depth that they will never fill. It is only in the sharing of human companionship that this mysterious depth in the human person can be filled. The Creator provides for Adam the perfect companion: 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'. Paradoxically, this companionship becomes life-giving in self-donation, and destructive in selfish exploitation. The true beauty of human sexuality shines out as this self-donation finds expression in the body language which is part of God's creation; Jesus quotes the Genesis text, 'the two become one'. The body language of sexuality is not only the expression of authentic self-donation, but also the source of new human lives – marriage is a sharing in the work of the Creator. Though the account of Jesus welcoming the 'little children' is a separate incident, it follows on well from the discussion of marriage, reminding us of the children who are so often forgotten in the discussion of marriage relationships today. Marriage breakdown is a very complex pastoral problem. But the great ideal Jesus puts before us must never be forgotten.

We begin reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, a treatise written to give heart to Jewish converts, who were tempted to lapse into a mood of anticlimax and nostalgia, in a world that seemed little changed after the Resurrection. Its message is straightforward; the things of old Israel were only shadows; now – by faith – we possess all that these shadows promised. Today's passage is a fine description of the Paschal Mystery that should be central to Christian faith. Jesus is 'crowned with glory and splendour' after he has shared life with us. His death has been a source of life for all mankind - after sharing our 'imperfect' world and its 'suffering' he has given us a share in his 'glory' and 'holiness'. He is forever our 'leader' and our 'brother'.

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