

Sunday 27
10/7/18

Our readings today speak of marriage. Our Gospel for today, taken from Mark, quotes from the second chapter of Genesis which describes the sexes themselves as God's creation. It says: God made them male and female. Therefore gender is something very good. Does that need to be repeated today? Are there people today who would say that the body and the material world of which it is part are evil? If there are, then we can tell them that this is not the teaching of the Bible. The Bible says that gender is something that comes from the creative hand of God. Then a conclusion is drawn from this creative fact. The genders seek each other out. The man leaves his parents to find his wife and they become one flesh.

Our first reading for today, from this same chapter 2 of Genesis, describes the origin of the sexes in this way. The man God had created had not been able to find an equal, a real partner, among all the other divine creations. And so God goes about creating a real partner for him. That is the purpose of the poetic description of the woman's creation from the man's rib. It makes it possible for the man to recognize the woman as his equal, as bone of his bone and

flesh of his flesh. There is no denying the fact that the man precedes the woman in this description of creation. But it is also clear that God's first creation was deficient, and the purpose of the second creation, that of the woman, is to correct this deficiency.

In Tolstoy's novel, *Anna Karenina*, one of the characters, Levin, experiences his wife's anger for the first time and is about to respond in kind, but then realizes he cannot do so and explains why he cannot do so in this way. A man feels a blow from behind and turns around to respond in kind, but then finds that he has hit himself on the edge of a table. That is how it is with his wife, Levin believes. To quarrel with her would be like hitting himself because he can no longer clearly distinguish where he leaves off and she begins. He and his wife are equal, are partners, are one flesh. A Sr. Mary McGlone quotes a scripture scholar, David Cotter, who describes the experience of a person who has found someone who could be a partner in this way: "One feels as though a hitherto unknown part of oneself is being discovered." Shakespeare wrote that "Love's not Time's fool though rosy lips and cheeks within his bending sickle's compass come, but love bears it out even to the edge of doom" (116). In other words, love goes beyond looks. So is the ideal. And sometimes we meet it in an ordinary remark a husband might make. You ask him if he would

like to do this or that and he responds: “Wait a minute. Let me check with my wife. Or often the phrase is: “Let me check with the boss.”

Our Gospel teaches us that the Lord defended the permanency of marriage. But it also reveals to us that both in his day and in his own Jewish tradition divorce was a reality. And we know from St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, ch. 7, that divorce was also a reality in the early church. Paul allowed new Christians to remarry if their spouses were unwilling to continue to live with them after they had become Christians. And in the passage in Matthew’s Gospel which parallels the passage from Mark which is our Gospel today the Lord says: “And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife except for unchastity and marries another commits adultery.”

Scholars argue about the word unchastity means here, but, whatever its meaning, it is nevertheless clear that the Lord himself is allowing for divorce in this case.

In its history our church has attempted to do two things: to remain faithful to the Lord’s understanding of the original nature of marriage and at the same time to acknowledge the fact that this ideal is not always possible. And we might add a third thing: it has

claimed that marriage is a sign and symbol of Christ's love for his church, his bride. Therefore, it is a sacrament.

In the difficult current of today's society let us be grateful for all those among us who live their marriages faithfully. May the Lord continue to support you. And for those of you who have been blessed with children, may your children grow up to thank you and bless you for your faithful love and then imitate you in their own married lives. Amen.