

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Genesis 2:18-24

Some modern scripture scholars speculate that the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible, The Law/Torah) is a collection of writings from different sources; primarily J (for Yahwehist, 9th century B.C.); E (for Elohist, 8th century B.C.); D (for Deuteronomist, 7th century B.C.); and P (for Priestly, post-exilic) and that this collection was combined in the post exilic period under the guiding hand of the Priestly tradition. For almost 2 millennia, up until the 18th century, the Pentateuch was attributed to Moses as the author by both Jewish and Christian tradition. When reading these books and applying them to the New Testament, it is best to remember that the New Testament authors did not see contradictions in these writings and considered only that Moses was the sole author.

Genesis gives an account of the origin of all created things and acts, as it were, as an elaborate introduction to God's later revelation to Israel through Moses. Genesis contains the history of Israel's ancestors, the great patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph – and is, therefore, the history of a family – Abraham's – from which the chosen people came. Today we go back to the earliest history.

During the Easter vigil, regardless of whether we are in Cycle A, B, or C, we hear the first creation account from Genesis 1:1 through 2:2. In this account, God creates everything in six days and rests on the seventh. What has been called the second creation account, Genesis 2:4b through 2:25, can also be considered to be an elaboration on Genesis 1:27 *“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”*.

18 The LORD God said: “It is not good for the man to be alone.

God's observation (decision) that the earth creature should not be alone will lead to the creation of a helper for him (helpmate comes from the archaic “helpmeet” which means “meet or fitting helper”).

I will make a suitable partner for him.

Woman compliments man, a social being by nature, but is not a mere service appendage; she has a similar nature.

19 So the LORD God formed out of the ground various wild animals and various birds of the air,

They are formed in the same manner as Adam in 2:7, but without the “breath” (*ruah*) of God.

and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each of them would be its name.

Adam names the animals which means he knows about them and recognizes that they are not suitable to be his partner. In Hebrew etymology, to know the “name” of something is to have power over it.

²⁰ The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man.

No animal is a suitable partner for man and man recognized this. They have no nature corresponding to his.

²¹ So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man,

The deep sleep of man suggests the mysterious and highly significant nature of God’s activity (see Genesis 15:12).

and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

²² The LORD God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man, ²³ the man said: “This one, at last,

After the parade of animals, finally, Adam finds a suitable partner. Acknowledges the gift of God.

is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;

Someone of the same nature

This one shall be called ‘woman,’ for out of ‘her man’ this one has been taken.”

“Woman” means “from the womb of man.”

²⁴ That is why

A summary of the teaching follows.

a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.

Being of the same nature, they are one. The unity of marriage and its monogamous nature

is God-willed.

Comment: Although this reading has been chosen to show the origin of the Church's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage, it also shows the reason why the Church neither endorses nor condemns either the theory of creation science or that of evolution. There is not enough concrete scriptural evidence to support or deny either theory. The only clear thing is that God was the creator of it all. He also gave us the mind and curiosity to attempt to discover the physics and biology of how He did it.

2nd Reading - Hebrews 2:9b-11

Last week we finished our study of the Epistle of James; the epistle which Martin Luther called "the epistle of straw" because it does not support his theory of salvation by faith alone. In leaving this epistle, we now proceed to the Book of Hebrews; another book which Martin Luther tried to eliminate from the Bible.

The identity of the author of Hebrews is unknown. With the exception of 1 John, it is the only New Testament epistle which begins without a greeting mentioning the writer's name. The earliest known view of its authorship is that of Tertullian (A.D. 160-250) who ascribed it to Barnabas. Its ascription to Paul goes back at least to the end of the second century in the Church of Alexandria.

Hebrews, rather than being a true letter is probably a homily, and was probably written around A.D. 67. Some scholars would like to place the date sometime after A.D. 70, but there are references to the temple in Jerusalem and the worship offered there. The temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 and this would most likely have been mentioned if that event had occurred before this epistle was written.

The target audience is a people who are in all probability converts from Judaism, many of whom may also have been priests or Levites. After becoming Christians, because of the difficult circumstances of the time, they had to abandon Jerusalem, the holy city, and seek refuge elsewhere. In their exile they look back with nostalgia on the splendor of the cult they played a part in prior to their conversion.

They feel deceived and are tempted to give up their new faith, in which they are not yet well grounded. In addition to this they are discontented by the persecution they suffer because of their new faith. Obviously, they are in need of help, and in particular, of clear doctrine to bolster their faith and enable them to cope with temptation to infidelity.

Today's reading talks about Jesus' exaltation (honor, status) through abasement (lowering in rank).

⁹ [H]e who "for a little while" was made "lower than the angels,"

This refers back to 1:3-4 “*When he had accomplished purification from sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, as far superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than*”. This sets up the hierarchy of God-angels-man. Jesus, who is God, freely humbled Himself and lowered Himself to suffer punishment and death; sufferings to which angels, as purely spiritual beings, are not subject.

that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

By “tasting” it shows that He accepted death voluntarily; without ceasing to be the Lord of life. All men fear death, but Jesus accepted it voluntarily in order to become the sin sacrifice which purified the altar forever and also to become the sacrificial meal which must be eaten to seal the family covenant. This was done out of love and was the greatest human achievement possible.

¹⁰ For it was fitting that he,

After pointing out the results of Christ’s death, the text now stresses how appropriate it was that it should be done in this manner – He had to make Himself in every way like his ‘brethren’ in order to help them.

for whom and through whom all things exist,

God is the creator and in Him all that He has made finds its purpose (1 Corinthians 8:6; Romans 11:36).

in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader

Refers to Jesus

to their salvation perfect through suffering.

Suffering perfects us – it glorifies humanity (our human nature needs perfection).

¹¹ He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin.

Jesus’ sacrifice not only consecrated the altar for all eternity, it also consecrated all future offerings (Romans 12:1 “*offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship*”). Consecration reserves it for God’s use and makes it perfect (Exodus 28:41; John 17:17,19).

Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them “brothers,”

We all belong to the family of God through our covenant relationship with Him, “he is not ashamed” Jesus is our brother, not some distant deity (Romans 8:14-17).

Gospel - Mark 10:2-16

We continue, for the third week to study Jesus' second instruction to His apostles on His mission and their discipleship. Having revealed Himself as the Messiah, He is now giving them a crash course in Christology and Discipleship. This teaching is yet another challenge to those who wish to follow Him. Verse 1 tells us that Jesus has now left Galilee and is in Judea.

² The Pharisees approached [Jesus]

The Pharisees were a religious party whose membership was largely lay, as opposed to the Sadducees, whose membership was mostly clerical. Unlike the Sadducees, who regarded only the Torah as binding, the Pharisees acknowledged the oral traditions of the elders as having binding power. They believed, as the Sadducees did not, in angels, spirits, and the resurrection of the dead (which is why they were sad-you-see). The fact that the Pharisees are mentioned indicates that they were testing Jesus.

and asked, "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?" They were testing him.

The question concerns the legality of divorce, not the grounds for divorce (see Matthew 19:3). The question is expressed in such a way as to indicate that the questioners knew that Jesus' prohibition of divorce conflicted with the assumption behind Deuteronomy 24:1-4. This question may have been designed to draw Jesus into conflict with Herod. John the Baptist had been baptizing in the Jordan River in Galilee (Mark 1:9) when he was arrested and later beheaded by Herod because of his condemnation of Herod's marriage (Mark 6:17-29; Luke 3:19-20). Mark 10:1 tells us that Jesus is now in this same region.

³ He said to them in reply, "What did Moses command you?"

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 takes the institution of divorce for granted; it concerns only the procedure to be followed. The grounds for divorce are stated vaguely and this vagueness lead to rabbinic debate about how to specify it (see Matthew 5:32; 19:9). In Mark, the issue is very basic: "Is divorce lawful?"

⁴ They replied, "Moses permitted him to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her."

Divorce was not a public legal action in a court, the husband simply wrote out a decree (I release and divorce my wife this day) and gave it to her.

⁵ But Jesus told them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this commandment.

The same thing God said to Pharaoh (Exodus 4:21; 7:3, 13, 14, 22, 23; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34, 35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10, etc.). Jesus points out that the teaching of Deuteronomy 24:1-4

is a concession to human weakness and a deviation from the original plan of God for marriage. Jesus will now play one Old Testament passage against another.

6 But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. 7 For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother (and be joined to his wife), 8 and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh.

Jesus quotes Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 – the effect is to assert that God's original plan was that a married couple constituted "one flesh" so divorce was impossible. Jesus' teaching restores God's original plan. No exceptions are foreseen (see Matthew 5:32; 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16).

"I will call your attention to the law of monogamy. The very origin of the human race sanctions it. It is abundantly clear that God ordained it at the beginning as a pattern for posterity. For after He had made Adam, and had foreseen the necessity of providing a helpmate for him, He borrowed from his loins one alone. One woman only did He design for man" [Tertullian (between A.D. 208-212), *An Exhortation to Chastity*, 5].

9 Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate."

The "human being" is the husband, not a judge, since according to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 the husband could initiate and carry out this procedure. There was no need for a third party. Here, Jesus abrogates the Old Testament procedure.

10 In the house the disciples again questioned him about this.

This is not the house of the reading two weeks ago – that one was in Capernaum. The exact house is unknown but it indicates that what follows is a private instruction for the disciples. Therefore, what follows is a plain teaching devoid of parables.

11 He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her;

An absolute teaching, no exceptions (see also Luke 16:18a).

"Guilt in this does not attach merely to the man who divorces her. It attaches also to the man who takes her on, since he provides the starting point for the woman's sin" [Saint Clement of Alexandria (after A.D. 202), *Stromaties*, 2,23,146,1].

12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

According to Jewish law only the husband could institute divorce proceedings. This is seen as an adaptation of Jesus' teaching to the conditions of Roman law which allowed women to initiate divorce proceedings.

When the Christian realizes that this teaching applies to everyone at all times, he should not be afraid about people reacting against it. Pope John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* says: "It is a fundamental duty of the Church to reaffirm strongly ... the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage. To all those who, in our times, consider it too difficult, or indeed impossible, to be bound to one person for the whole of life, and to those caught up in a culture that rejects the indissolubility of marriage and openly mocks the commitment of spouses to fidelity, it is necessary to reconfirm the good news of the definitive nature of that conjugal love that has in Christ its foundation and strength (see Ephesians 5:25-33)."

We now go on to the blessing of the children – after marriage, a teaching about children is appropriate.

13 And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them,

As the conclusion of this story makes clear, they were seeking a blessing through the imposition of hands. The children could have been of any age from infants to 12 years.

but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them,

This is directed at the disciples because they fail to understand Jesus and the nature of the kingdom He preaches. The disciples serve as an example so that we may learn. Perhaps the children's parents understood Jesus' message better than the disciples did.

"Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

The chief characteristic of children is receptivity. The kingdom must be received as a gift, no human power or status can create or force it.

15 Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it."

This clarifies the last part of the previous verse: only those who accept the kingdom as a gift can expect to enter it. We are all God's children and as such must realize that He is our Father and we must learn dutifully at His knee (and perhaps on ours). As in our Gospel reading two weeks ago, "*Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the one who sent me*" (Mark 9:37). The whole of religion is summed up in the covenant: in the relationship of children with their good Father.

16 Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.