

**Homily for the 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time October 8, 2006**

*Genesis 2:18-24*

*Hebrews 2:9-11*

*Mark 10:2-16*

At first glance it may seem an unfortunate and sexist thing  
that God made woman from the rib of a man.

On the other hand, when you consider that God made the man out of dirt,  
the comparison seems not so unhappy!

Perhaps we've just never looked at the story close enough  
to see that Adam was made from dirt.

We might also have missed the fact  
that the first human need God attended to was loneliness.

God saw right away that it was not good  
for the man he made to be alone,  
that he needed a partner.

And a partner for the man God made and gave him, and her to him.

The story of creation in Genesis is a primitive tale  
but the desire of each of us not to be left alone  
is as real today as it was in the Garden of Eden.

In the gospel story the Pharisees are testing Jesus.

Like reporters at a press conference,  
the Pharisees would like to catch Jesus in a trap –  
but they fail because Jesus trumps their question with his answer.

Moses had indeed allowed for divorce,  
but Jesus goes back further, back to the creation story,  
and teaches that in marriage  
the spouses are no longer two but now one flesh,  
joined inseparably by God.

And here begins the Christian understanding of marriage as a sacrament.

Not only is marriage a way to heal the alone-ness of the human heart,  
it is also intended as a sign of how God's love for us  
is the ultimate healing of the heart's isolation.

It would be St. Paul, often vilified for his take on family relations,  
who would point out beautifully  
that the love of husband and wife  
is meant to be a sign of Christ's love for the church,  
and Christ's love for the church is  
unfailingly abiding and faithful, and always forgiving.

In their love for each other,  
the married couple is meant to a mirror of how Christ loves the church.

And how does Christ love the church?

*(pointing to the crucifix)*

“greater love than this no one has  
than to lay down one's life for one's friends...”

and for the married person, the friend most deserving of sacrificial love,  
is one's spouse.

We can't possibly begin to understand what Jesus teaches about divorce  
unless we understand what he means by marriage.

And there's the rub.

Many couples enter marriage not understanding  
what the sacrament of marriage expects of them.

It's easy for a couple to say,  
"We want a church wedding."

It's not so easy to say,  
"We want a marriage modeled on the love of Jesus."

Marriage is intended as one way to fill the alone-ness  
known by every human heart,  
including the hearts of the happily married.

But sometimes, sadly so,  
marriage yields the very opposite of what it intends:  
sometimes marriage fails and the brokenness  
only intensifies the loneliness.

There was, no doubt, a wisdom in Moses' allowing for divorce.  
But Jesus calls us to deeper, more demanding understanding of marriage -  
and there is no need to apologize for calling married persons  
to a sacrificial love modeled on the self-giving of Jesus.

Still, the sacrifice of Jesus was meant  
for the forgiveness of sins, the healing of broken relationships  
and the mending of tears in the fabric of our families.

How then does the church, *can* the church, *will* the church find ways  
to forgive and heal and fill the alone-ness  
of those whose marriages have failed?

This past month I have celebrated 5 weddings at this altar.  
I hope and I pray (and I tried to help those five couples understand)  
the depth of the love Christian marriage asks of them.

Among us right now at this altar  
are married couples - some happy and some not so happy;  
couples in marriages the church recognizes,  
and couples in marriages the church does not recognize;  
here are separated persons, divorced people;  
couples living as spouses but not yet married;  
engaged couples, single people, celibates  
and those who have lost a spouse in death...

And all of us know the alone-ness which God tended to  
in the garden of Genesis.

Even today, the Lord tends to our hearts, all of them,  
by inviting us to his table, where he embraces us,  
because he knows that it is not good for us to be alone.

The scriptures tell us that Christ is the bridegroom  
and the Church is the bride.

Our spouse invites us to the table of his wedding feast  
and feeds us with the gift of his life.

May the sacrament of his presence fill and heal and mend  
our lonely and broken hearts.

*Rev. Austin Fleming*