



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE B

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Today's passage combines Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce with a section on children and the kingdom. Talk of marriage logically leads to talk of children, and this arrangement may reflect an early catechism providing Jesus' teaching on these subjects.

The teaching on divorce is one of the most difficult parts of this gospel for many people. Unlike Matthew and Paul, Mark includes no exceptions to Jesus' absolute prohibition against divorce. This probably reflects Jesus' own position, which later writers found necessary to adapt a bit.

Mark also adapts the original statement from the Old Testament by making it apply to women as well as to men. Though there may have been some exceptions, generally, in Judaism, only the husband could initiate divorce; for Mark's Gentile audience, Roman law allowed either party to divorce the other.

Jesus bases his opposition to divorce on the teaching of Genesis that marriage makes the two one flesh. Thus, he insists, God did not intend divorce, and Moses allowed it only because of the people's unwillingness to live up to this ideal.

It is on this teaching that the Catholic Church has based its position on the impossibility of ending a true sacramental marriage. Whether you think more exceptions should be made or not, it is clear that Jesus gave an absolute ideal for his followers to seek.

When you give a reflection on this passage, then, hold up that ideal before your readers. Though some who are divorced and remarried may be discomfited by this message, it is important for us to hear Jesus' words and commit ourselves to following them as best we can, even as we admit our weakness and inadequacy at times.

The section on children takes us in another direction with its emphasis on what is necessary to receive the kingdom. Many reflections have been written idealizing children and suggesting that people imitate child-like behavior. The point here is simply that children are unable to fend for themselves; they are dependent and thus know how to receive. The kingdom comes as a gift from God - we don't earn it. We must receive it as children receive everything they need.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark.

Some Pharisees came, and to test Jesus they asked,
"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"
Jesus answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said,
"Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her."
But Jesus said to them,
"Because of your hardness of heart
he wrote this commandment for you.
But from the beginning of creation,
'God made them male and female.'
'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother
and be joined to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh.'
So they are no longer two, but one flesh.
Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.
Jesus said to them,
"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another
commits adultery against her;
and if she divorces her husband and marries another,
she commits adultery."

People were bringing little children to him
in order that Jesus might touch them;
and the disciples spoke sternly to them.
But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to
me; do not stop them:
for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you,
whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

And Jesus took them up in his arms,
laid his hands on them, and blessed them.