

## Homily for the 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday (Mark)

The temptation this weekend was to concentrate on the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of today's gospel passage and in which Jesus reprimands the disciples for stopping little children coming to him. But that would be to refuse to acknowledge the elephant in the room, namely Jesus' response to the question put to him by the Pharisees, 'Is it against the law for a man to divorce his wife?' they did so 'to test Jesus', in other words this was not an open question, but a wilful attempt to get Jesus to say something that would incriminate him.

As in other situations Jesus asks them a question in turn, 'What did Moses command you?' They replied, 'Moses allowed us to draw up a writ of dismissal and so to divorce.' We need to unravel this a little before we go on. According to the Law of Moses only a man could divorce his wife, the wife had no such rights. She could sue for a divorce, but only the man could grant the divorce. Moreover, by the time of Jesus, there were two main schools of thought, we would call the first strict where divorce was only allowed in the case of infidelity, and the second lax where the husband could divorce his wife if, and I quote, 'she displeases him'. So, even according to the Law of Moses there is a clear inequality between what the husband and wife could or could not do in terms of divorce, and there was a huge discrepancy in terms of the grounds for divorce. So Jesus goes back first to the Law of Moses – it was because you were so unteachable that he wrote this commandment for you – but then he goes back to God's original intention which was the story we heard in the first reading from the Book of Genesis and which Jesus quotes ending with 'what God has united, human beings must not divide.'

The ideal is that marriage is for life and I have never met a couple who when preparing for marriage have not wanted that to be the case. The reality as we know only too well for many people, maybe ourselves or members of our own families, or people we know, is that some marriages end in separation and divorce. Let's be clear, the Church does not forbid divorce, indeed in some cases, such as domestic abuse, it would encourage the legal protection divorce would bring. A person who has been divorced can still, with the full backing of Church authorities, receive Communion. The issue concerns those who have been divorced and remarry. Some seek an annulment, and if successful, are able to remarry within the Church. But many either do not want to go through what can be a lengthy and harrowing process or do not have the grounds for an annulment, but do wish to remarry. The same can be true for priests and religious who have left active ministry without a dispensation.

In a society which is totally different to that of Jesus' time, the Church retains the ideal, upholding the sanctity of marriage. However, recently there has been a change in attitude with Pope Francis speaking of the importance of being sensitive to those whose relationships have broken down, and all of us, in our own parishes, can support and welcome all people, those who are married, separated, divorced, remarried, single, widowed and bereaved and assure them of our continued friendship and prayers.

## Bidding Prayers for the 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday

Celebrant:

May the Lord bless us all the days of our life – with these words of today's psalm in our minds and hearts we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

For the Church – that the Church will always uphold the dignity of marriage and family life but also reach out and support those who are experiencing difficulty and those whose marriages have come to an end.

Lord in your mercy

For our political and civic leaders – that they will support marriage and family life in its many different facets.

Lord in your mercy

For those children who have suffered the horror of abuse by clergy, family members and others with power over them – that they will be given all the help and support they need to overcome their trauma, and that those guilty of abuse will repent.

Lord in your mercy

For all grandparents who are so involved in the lives of their grandchildren – that they will be given the love and respect they deserve.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the Covid 19 pandemic, and Eileen Patricia Riley, Giles Greaves, Glynn Hughes, Florence Annie Friedrich and Gerard Palmer whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

God of love, you created us male and female to continue your work of creation. Through our prayers for one another, may our love reflect that of your risen Son who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen