

SUNDAY 27 (B) (2021)

A) GENESIS

- "Every great religion has sacred stories which account for the beginning of creation and the human race." (Denis McBride)
- the book of Genesis has two stories, and it is the second of these which we hear in today's first reading
- God creates man from the dust of the soil, he breathes life into the man, and then creates a beautiful garden in the midst of the wasteland
- the Garden of Eden is man's first home
- the man God creates is the human race; he embodies the whole of humanity
- to relieve his aloneness, God sets about creating a helper, a suitable companion
- he brings to Adam a whole series of creatures, whom Adam names, but no suitable helper is to be found among them
- so God has to think again
- he makes Adam fall into a deep sleep and takes something from him
- this something God encloses in flesh and it becomes a new creature, a woman
- This he brings to the man, who exclaims, "At last! - thank goodness!"
- the writer adds, "This is why a man leaves father and mother and joins himself to his wife and they become one body."
- in marriage the two separate human beings become one body, a single entity, a new creation

B) GOSPEL: PHARISEES' QUESTION

- In the Gospel, some Pharisees ask Jesus if it is against the Law for a man to divorce his wife.
- they are not really interested in the answer;
- they are putting Our Lord on the spot by presenting him with a difficult question.
- HE asks, "What about Moses, the great Law-giver of the Old Testament? What did HE say?"
- it seems that the Law did allow a man to divorce his wife, but he had to safeguard her interests by giving her a writ of dismissal, which freed her to marry again
- what the Law did not make clear was in what circumstances divorce was legal.
- the strict school said that the only ground for divorce was adultery, while the more benign school allowed divorce for more trivial reasons
- in Jesus' time, divorce was common and marriage offered little security for a woman who could be dismissed at her husband's whim.
- Jesus seeks to change all that.

C) JESUS' ANSWER

- in his answer, Jesus does not challenge the Law of Moses, but claims that it was a concession to human sinfulness
- he recalls God's original plan for marriage, revealed in Genesis: that man and woman be united in an indissoluble bond
- in restoring marriage to a serious life-long commitment, Jesus' argument also protects the woman from being treated as a disposable possession of her husband.

D) JESUS' CONTRIBUTION (SACRAMENT)

- but Jesus then goes on to make two important additions to his teaching on marriage
- the first is that he makes marriage a SACRAMENT, a visible sign of invisible grace; and those who are married will have this and other sacraments to help them.
- it is the husband and wife (NOT THE PRIEST) who administer the sacrament to one another.
- every day of his life, the husband is challenged to be a minister of God's grace to his wife.
- and she is challenged every day of her life, to be a minister of God's grace to her husband.
- in every act of love shown by each partner, Christ's life and power and love are also present.
- Each partner is the chief means by which the other will grow in holiness.
- Their love for each other becomes a sacrament or visible sign of God's faithful and unchanging love for us all.

C) JESUS' CONTRIBUTION (NEW COMMANDMENT)

- The second new element is the standard he sets.
- I GIVE YOU A NEW COMMANDMENT, he says to all his disciples. LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.
- this new commandment is lived out in a special way in married love.
- Jesus asks that the love of husband and wife for one another should be like his own: faithful, unchanging and self-sacrificing.
- We have only to look at the crucifix to see what that might mean.
- The ideal is such that if people want to know what Christ's love for the Church is like..
- if they want to know what God's love for each one of us is like, then they have only to look to the love of a Christian wife and husband, lived well.

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