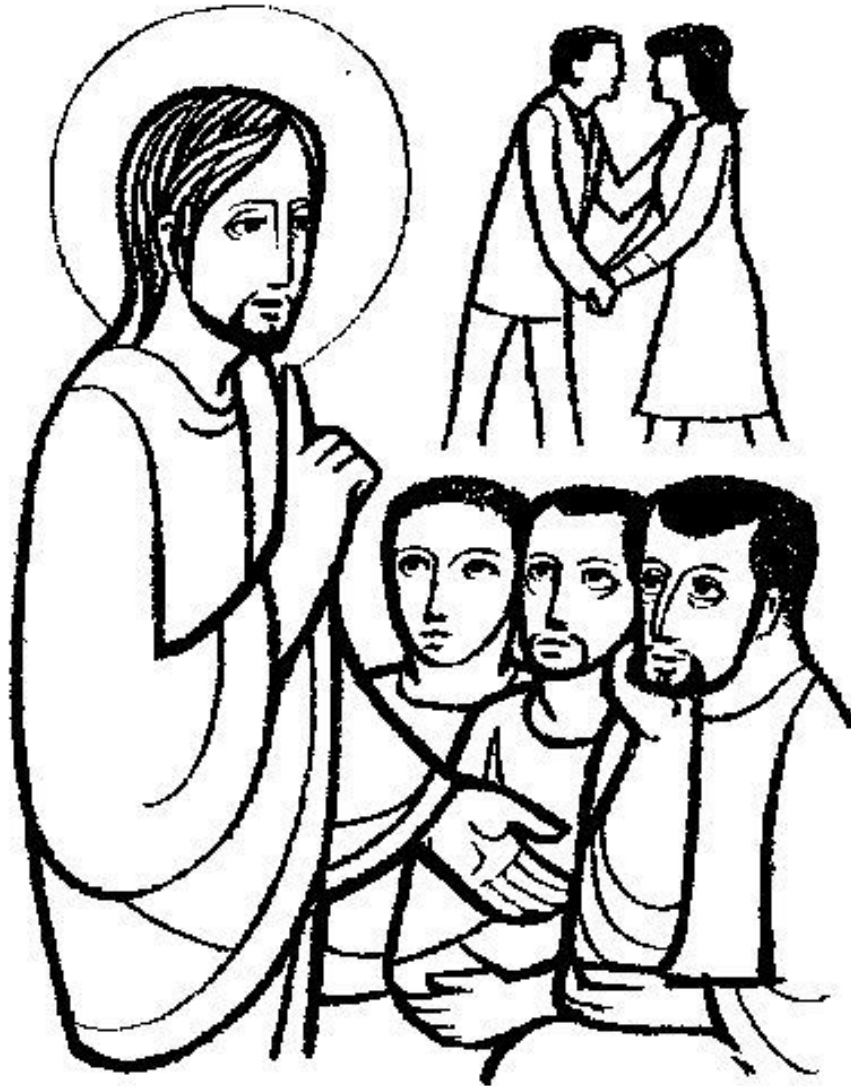


# the Sunday Readings



*Jesus was speaking about a graced relationship;  
the unconditional gift-love in a marriage partnership.*  
(Mark 10: 2 – 16)

## 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time (b)

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## *equal before God*<sup>1</sup>

### introduction

Included among us when we gather are many divorced – or those who have remarried after their divorce. For them today's reading from the Gospel of Mark could re-open old wounds and stir again, feelings of failure. But Jesus re-directs Pharisee questions about the legality of divorce, to a conversation about marriage and its original purpose! So rather than arousing guilt about marriage failure, Jesus shares his understanding of marriage as a gift of God's "good work" in creation – a gift of complementarity and partnership between a man and a woman – as equals before God and as help-mates to each other.

### first reading: Genesis 2: 18 – 24<sup>2</sup>

[ Adam and Eve ]

*Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." (18) So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.(19) The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.(20) So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.(21) And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.(22) Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."(23) Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.(24)*

This account of creation begins and ends with the creation of 'man'.<sup>3</sup> The Lord God's creative power remains incomplete. A process of 'trial and error' populates the Earth with other creatures. Naming the animals and birds, signifies humankind's relationship of control, or dominion, over these creations of the Lord God. But still no fit helper is found for incomplete 'man'! Woman is created as a helper fit for man (vv.22-24). Man recognises that he needs woman. She is essentially like him.<sup>4</sup> The essential oneness of the two distinct persons in relationship is proclaimed. The man recognises and responds to his incomplete-

1 Cover Image: image for 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – from the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart – Peru. [www.mscperu.org/indexgraficos.htm](http://www.mscperu.org/indexgraficos.htm)

2 The biblical excerpts are drawn from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), published by Oxford University Press (1994).

3 In Hebrew 'adam' refers to genus and first individual. The first human being appears as male and lonely (vv.18-20).

4 Woman is created, 'from man's rib'. Woman may be derived from man, but is not his inferior.

ness (v.23).<sup>5</sup> Unlike the human relationship with animals, neither man nor woman is complete without the other. Each is created for and to complete the other. They are *'one flesh'*.<sup>6</sup> They complete the relationship created by The Lord. Their true nature is revealed, only as they begin to relate to each other and to their environment, as feeling, rational and responsible beings.

God's sensitive care for the needs of the first human, Adam, formed from the clay of Earth, using the same ground from which Adam was formed, shapes and brings forth tame and wild animals and birds. Though made from the same *'stuff'*, none of them proved to be the suitable partner capable of companionship; of sparking creativity and nurturing new life; of helping to care for creation. When Adam encounters the partner that God then brings forth for him, he recognises that they are created for each other, to unite as one in a new and fuller union.<sup>7</sup>

**response: Psalm 128 : 1 – 6**

**the happy home of the faithful ]**

*Happy is everyone who fears the Lord,  
who walks in his ways.(1)  
You shall eat the fruit  
of the labour of your hands;  
you shall be happy,  
and it shall go well with you.(2)  
Your wife will be like  
a fruitful vine within your house;  
your children will be like olive shoots  
around your table.(3)  
Thus shall the man be blessed  
who fears the Lord.(4)  
The Lord bless you from Zion.  
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem  
all the days of your life.(5)  
May you see your children's children.  
Peace be upon Israel!(6)*

The ever-reliable God will bless the reverent (v.1). God's blessing is concrete, promising satisfaction, prosperity, a fertile spouse and abundant children (vv.2-4).<sup>8</sup> The last verses (vv.5-6) extend the blessing to all people for generations to come. Devotion to Torah (v.1a) means, *'fearing the Lord and following the Lord's*

5 [v.23] There is a play on the similar-sounding Hebrew words; *ishsha* (woman) and *ishah* (her man, her husband).

6 [v.24] *'One flesh'*: Classical Hebrew has no specific word for *'body'*. The writer stresses the fact that conjugal union is willed by God.

7 In the context of *the Season of Creation*, it is important to give greater attention to those other living creatures that this passage from Genesis refers to as *'tame and wild animals and birds'*. While none of them proves to be *'the suitable partner'*, they are much more integral to human life and flourishing than is portrayed in Genesis. Each creature is important and contributes to the health and resilience of the biodiverse ecosystem in which it lives. Humans belong in the right relationship within this Earth community. We are made from the same stuff of the Earth and are cared for by our co-creatures and the land.

ways" (v.1b). Such devout conduct will be rewarded in this world with prosperity and blessings. This reflects the spirit of *the Book of Deuteronomy*. It may be too naive to be realistic, but the notion that piety and virtue are the foundations of family life, never goes out-of-date.<sup>9</sup>

The speaker's words reflect the serenity, goodness and the reliability of life. The perspective is that of a person who enjoys many of life's material benefits in addition to a well-ordered home-life. Appreciation of life's rich blessings leads to the expression of genuine gratitude and piety. Life is good and there's every reason to suppose that this blessed state will continue. Such speech affirms and builds a sense of a reliable world. Songs of blessing work in a context of good order and well-being.

**second reading: Hebrews 2 : 9 – 11**

[ exaltation through abasement ]

*But we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.(9) It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.(10) For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.(11)*

The writer emphasises the supreme place that Jesus holds in the universe. By his suffering, death, resurrection and entering into glory as a human being, Jesus made it possible for the human race to be what God intended it to be. The letter is written for Israelite Christians to persuade them that they cannot continue to remain within Judaism. Christ, as the expression of God, shares divinity and reveals the divinity to 'the sons (and daughters) of Abraham', that is, the Israelites. Jesus achieved his 'glory' through suffering. The Son identified with the Israelites and can take them with him.

In principle the whole universe is subject to Christ's dominion, but in the concrete, it's not yet totally under control. The writer sees a theology of close relationship between, 'Saviour' and 'the saved'; 'the Son' and 'sons' (and daughters); 'Sanctifier' and 'the sanctified'. Jesus' suffering would be effective in cancelling the heavy debt of sin recorded against *the sons (and daughters)* of Israel (Abraham). They would be able to benefit from the merits Jesus accumulated through his sacrifice. Hence the superiority of this new revelation to the old which it perfects or completes.

8 The perspective of the Psalmist is that of the adult male, ordinarily the ruler and representative of the household to the community.

9 For example, the passage in Mark that mentions Jesus blessing young children (cf. *Mk.10:15-16*).

**gospel reading: Mark 10 : 2 – 16**

[ Jesus teaches what God has 'joined together', let no one separate ]

*Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"(2) He answered them, "What did Moses command you?"(3) They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her."(4) But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you.(5) But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'(6) 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,(7) and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh.(8) Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."(9) Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.(10) He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her;(11) and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."(12) People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them.(13) 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.(14) Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." (15) And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.(16)*

A couple united in love, faithfully living God's plan, 'from the beginning', is one of the signs of *the reigning of God* according to Jesus in the gospel of Mark. The allowable grounds for divorce was a topic of much debate among Jesus' contemporaries.<sup>10</sup> Jesus says Moses' commandment at best, permitted divorce, because of men's hardness of heart and their lack of loving (vv.3-9). This didn't fit with God's purpose which was lifelong fidelity in a partnership between equals. Jesus taught that what God has, '*joined together*', no human being must separate.

This takes on a new and more profound and challenging meaning, as we become aware through contemporary science and Pope Francis' writings, that every creature is actually, '*joined together*', with every other, in complex and evolving webs of inter-dependence.

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10 *The Law (the Torah of Moses)* said a man could dismiss his wife when he was not pleased with her (Dt.24:1). All a man had to do was sign a document giving up the wife. The Torah didn't say the wife could dismiss the husband. Interpreting this text Rabbi Shammai insisted that a man could only divorce his wife when there was a serious cause. Rabbi Hillel said divorce was possible for any reason at all. The Pharisees ask Jesus, "*Is divorce lawful?*" They sense Jesus wouldn't accept the injustice to women of Hillel's interpretation.

God has '*joined together*' everything with which we share Earth and the Universe beyond, in one great web of inter-dependent life.<sup>11</sup> Jesus corrects *the Torah of Moses* by going back to the beginning; the opening chapters in Genesis,<sup>12</sup> where the power-based domination of one person over another did not exist. God created the sexes equal; a free human race without any kind of exploitation. Jesus affirms that marriage is a lifelong and profound union of two people, as '*one flesh*' (v.8). The beginning of exploitation was symbolised by the loss of paradise.<sup>13</sup> The Lord God announced to the woman, that from then on she would be dominated by man.<sup>14</sup> God also announced the future sorrows of humanity: to give birth in sorrow; exploitation in work; conflict with nature; and death.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus clarifies that exploitation wasn't with us from the beginning, so there is no reason why it has to be with us forever. Later the disciples question Jesus further about this and he said that adultery is a falsification. Like watering down the beer. It's an injustice. Jesus is against a law that oppresses the weak because it's no sign of God's reigning. In another case of adultery, Jesus took the side of the woman against the law.<sup>16</sup> Jesus opposed the divorce law, because it was a law that oppressed women. If the prohibition of divorce and re-marriage became an oppressive law for some men or women today, it is probable that Jesus wouldn't agree with this new law either.

Jesus puts *the power of love* above divorce law. He is speaking about '*a graced situation*'; the unconditional gift of Christian love in a marriage partnership. The '*gift*' of the relationship, makes the marriage indissoluble. Jesus speaking about the love of a human couple, ignores *the Torah of Moses* and any other laws. Rather, he speaks of paradise.<sup>17</sup> Jesus urges that his disciples must renew themselves in love. It's the same as being like a child; '*powerless yet receptive*' (vv.13-16). That's the way a new society is formed. For a child everyone is alike – everyone is equal. The reigning of God, or paradise, is the reigning of equality. To enter it, we adults have to be like children.<sup>18</sup> We are not to exploit or dominate each other.

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11 In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word "creation" has a broader meaning than "nature", for it has to do with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion. Pope Francis *Laudato Si'* #76.

12 Gn.1-2

13 Gn.3:24

14 *Ibid.* v.16

15 *Ibid.* v.19

16 Cf. Jn.8:3-11

17 I think Jesus is telling us that love and paradise are the same thing. That's our goal as disciples – married or not.

18 [v.15] '*Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child:*' i.e. in total dependence upon and obedience to the gospel (cf Mt.18:3-4).

**for sharing:**<sup>19</sup>

- *The story of Adam and Eve. Comment on Genesis 2: 18–24*
- *Exaltation through abasement. Comment on Hebrews 2: 9–11*
- *Jesus teaches what God has joined together, let no one separate. Comment on Mark 10: 2–16*

**prayer:**<sup>20</sup>

*Creator God, in Christ You call man and woman  
to the fullness of glory  
for which You created them in Your image.  
Heal our hardened hearts,  
renew our obedience to Your spoken will,  
and conform our lives to Your gracious design.  
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,  
who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever. Amen*

**review:**<sup>21</sup>

*We yearn for a new world, a new self and a new future. The liturgical texts challenge us to let them "fund" an alternative imagination! To refuse this challenge consigns our community to disappear with the rest of the modern world. But to accept the challenge of the texts, can liberate the church as a community of disciples; can liberate couples to express genuine creative gift-love for their partners and it can liberate children, the elderly, and all who are powerless and vulnerable!*

*Our "hardness of heart" can be changed by the offer of new models and images of how the pieces of life fit together. New models and images invite us into the*

19 Lectio Divina: reading God's WORD in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us: The practise of *lectio divina* requires a quiet space, a passage of scripture and the willingness to give time to the project. The passage used should be short. For the purpose of this leaflet, we suggest using the gospel reading of the up-coming Sunday. There are four steps in the traditional practise of *lectio divina*. The steps don't have to have the following order: *lectio* (reading) – read the passage of Scripture read slowly - more than once. If a particular word, phrase, or sentence seems significant (even if you don't know why) you may want to write it down. *meditatio* (reflection) – let the significant words fill your mind without straining to analyse them. We are in God's presence and so let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding of the words. *oratio* (prayer) – allow your heart to speak to God, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture, or by the thoughts that have come to you, while reflecting on it. *contemplatio* (rest) – let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of God, in simple and wordless contemplation. This leaflet gives the context and some commentary on each of the readings and the psalm used in the Sunday's liturgy. Familiarity with the texts and the commentary beforehand, can better prepare our hearing and understanding the passages in our worship. Whatever our preparation for doing this exercise and whatever questions we may use to break open the passage, we must be conscious of Christ's promise: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them'

20 The prayer that concludes the Lectio Divina is ICEL's 1998 opening prayer from the Proper of the Day. These prayers draw upon the concrete and vivid images of Scripture and conclude with a clearly focused petition inspired by the readings.

21 The review – at the end of each reflection the review examines one of the themes of the readings, usually drawn from the gospel, and provides an opportunity to check our own performance, in the light of the WORD and Eucharist that we have previously heard and experienced.

*counter-story about God, the world, our neighbour and our self! There is the slow steady counter process of unlearning and disengaging from old models and images that we find no longer credible or adequate. An example of the need for this counter process is the common reduction of marriage to definitions of legal contract and property rights.*

*The moment of worship is when a real transformation can work a genuine newness from within our old failing world. We can appropriate a new understanding of the relationship of Christ and his people by our actions for compassion and justice. The relationship between God and God's people can become more like the relationship between truly equal partners in a sacramental marriage! The signs of God's creative love in the transformations of the liturgy can become for us, the signs of God's continuing creative love, just as the Exodus of the Hebrew people and the Resurrection of Jesus, are signs of God's creative love for people!*

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