

27th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Mark 10:2-16

From the very beginning the Church has testified to the holiness and indissolubility of marriage. In the third-century a great theologian wrote to his wife: “How can I ever express the happiness of a marriage joined by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels, and ratified by the Father? . . . How wonderful the bond between two believers, now one in hope, one in desire, one in discipline, one in the same service! They are both children of one Father and servants of the same Master, undivided in spirit and flesh, truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, one also is the spirit” (C.C.C. n. 1642; Tertullian, *Ad uxorem*, 2, 8, 6-7: PL 1, 1412-1413; cf. FC 13). In the fourth-century paintings were drawn in the catacombs in Rome showing a bride and a groom, behind who stands Our Lord, and below which reads the inscription, “Almighty God bound them in sweet matrimony.” St. Augustine of Hippo wrote of marriage that it has three goods: exclusiveness, children, and permanence. Later St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that marriage is not only for bearing of children and their education, but for the permanent bond shared by the spouses and the mutual love that this involves. Marriage is both a public and a Church relationship and a natural good that mediates divine love, contributes to the stability of the community, and acts as a witness to the love of God and the divine Kingdom.

From the book of Genesis we know that marriage is a sacrament of love, it is the “sacrament of creation.” In the Old Testament the covenant between man and woman becomes the “image and likeness” (cf. *Gen.* 1:27) of the covenant between God and man. Marriage is not simply a natural union in the order of creation, but also a reflection of God’s love and fidelity to the union with humanity. In the New Testament marriage is blessed by Our Lord and is a

recognition “that just as God remained faithful to his marriage with Israel in spite of the infidelity of so many of the people and now in Christ remains faithful to the Church, so Christians are called upon to mirror that fidelity in their marriage relationships and thus be ‘the sign to the nations’”.

The story of the wedding feast at Cana in the Gospel of St. John shows the importance Christ gave to marriage, for it was here that He worked “the first of his signs... and revealed His glory” (*Jn.* 2:11). In changing the water into wine, He echoed God’s gifts of the fruits of the earth to the first man and woman, so that both of these acts are a symbol of God’s care. In His disputes with the Pharisees Christ answers the question of divorce by saying, “what God has united, man must not divide,” (*Mk.* 10:9) meaning that marriage is of original order of creation; marriage is not a creation of humanity but of God, and it remains under the authority of God.

Marriage is a vocation. It shares in the work of God. In bearing and raising children in the Church spouses share in the work of creation. In living their life in faith they share in the perfecting of one another which is the work of salvation. In seeking the Sacrament they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ and their whole life is suffused by faith, hope and charity which is the work of sanctification. Marriage is in this way a participant in the common priesthood of the Church. As man and wife, spouses signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church. Consecrated for these duties by the Sacrament of Matrimony they increasingly further their own perfection and their mutual sanctification, and together they render glory to God.

Marriage is both a covenant and a community of love between a man and a woman, indissoluble as a matter of Christian love, and a prophetic symbol of the faithfulness of Christ and the Church and the covenant of God and humanity. However, the Church recognises that marriage can be exceedingly difficult and that it is not lived in a perpetual romantic atmosphere. It takes

great courage and humility to persevere through temptation and suffering and even abandonment. But even those whose marriage has been torn apart or who, with the best of intentions, have agreed to live separately, still remain witnesses to hope by remaining faithful to the vows that they made to one another before God and not entering into another union, for they testify to the fidelity of God to His covenant with each of us in spite of our own infidelity.

St. Paul wrote that spouses ought to imitate the relationship of Christ and the Church, as an image of the divine love, and a sign of the Kingdom of God. To be in the image of God is a matter of relationship to God and to others, not alone but for another and with another in the Church and for the kingdom of God (see *Eph.* 5:25-33).