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Friday's Gospel: Happy Forever

Gospel for Friday in the 19th Week of Ordinary Time, and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 19:3-12*)

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?”

He answered, “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘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. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”

They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?”

He said to them, “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.”

The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.” But he said to them, “Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves

eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.”

Commentary

This question that some Pharisees posed to Jesus is very current for us. It seems that, just like today, back then, in ancient times and cultures, divorce was the order of the day, even “for any reason.” And in a more remote past, it must have been something so widespread that even Moses had to issue laws to restrict it, as a lesser evil. But in his response, Jesus goes back right to the origin of creation, when God himself established the indissoluble union between man and woman. The model for this covenant will be God’s fidelity to his people. This is how the prophet expresses it: “I will betroth

you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord” (*Hosea* 2:19-20). The phrase “except for unchastity” does not mean that unchastity is a cause for divorce. The term used in Greek refers rather to an illegitimate union that cannot be healed (for example, incest), and that therefore must be dissolved. So this is not an exception to the indissolubility of matrimony.

The Creator wants and blesses marriage, for the happiness of the spouses and children, and for the good of the entire human community. Marriage is a divine vocation and hence requires discernment and preparation, and a determined will to seek the good of one’s spouse and family, and to persevere day after day in mutual love. And to do so always counting

on the help of divine grace to overcome the difficulties along the way. We could say that Jesus “suffers” with each infidelity and breakup: “The Lord was witness to you and the wife of your youth . . . she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. For I hate divorce, says the Lord” (*Malachi* 2:14-16).

In our imagination, we can go to the home in Nazareth. There Jesus as a child and adolescent witnessed the refined love between Mary and Joseph. In his perfect humanity, he “increased in wisdom and in age, and in favor with God and man” (*Lk* 2:52), under the protection of the example of his parents.

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