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Commentary on the Gospel: The Beauty of Faithful Love

Gospel for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B), and commentary

Gospel (*Mk* 10: 2-16)

And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

He answered them, “What did Moses command you?”

They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away.”

But Jesus said to them, “For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.’ So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”

And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.

And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said to them, “Let the children

come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.

Commentary

In this Gospel, Jesus makes use of a hostile question from the Pharisees to speak about the deepest law of any relationship: love that is given entirely, that gives life. When asked whether, as Scripture says, a man may put away his wife, Christ will show them another path, a divine path.

The starting point is the question whether it is licit to do so or not. This question, when speaking about love, is totally inadequate. The logic of

what is licit or illicit is the logic of what one must do or not do, the logic of rights and duties, of the limits of one's actions. In the end, it is the logic of one's own personal affirmation. And this logic fills the heart with sadness and hardens it. We may do hundreds of licit acts that, nevertheless, are empty of real love.

Divine logic is something else. It goes beyond the human logic of the Pharisees, since love goes beyond what is strictly owed. No one in love says to the beloved: "I will do with you what is licit and avoid what is illicit." Such a love dies. For love demands an encounter, the sharing of intimacy, embracing the weaknesses and fragilities of the other person, forgiving, discovering the beauty of the beloved, being fruitful, dreaming together...

Christ proposes a new perspective. He speaks to us of the plan of creation, of God's project. God has a plan of life and beauty for our lives.

If one's relationship to God and others is reduced to what is licit and what is illicit, one lives it in a cold and static way. But if we realize that God is always looking upon us with love, we realize that the defects of the other person (husband, wife, children, siblings, friends...) are a path for learning the art of loving, the art of becoming like Jesus.

When must we love the others? Only when they are perfect, without defects, likeable, punctual, useful; or rather also when they are weak, fragile, poor, and mistaken?

We are all called to relationships of fidelity, relationships in which we will always have abundant excuses to reject the other person: one's

husband, wife, children, family members, friends, colleagues...

If we think the other person only has the right to our love when it is merited, then we don't know how to love. Our heart has become hardened; it has become a heart of stone, and no longer reflects God's way of loving.

And to understand this we need to learn the value of being small and weak, being like children. So the second part of this Gospel passage is not there by accident.

Loving truly requires being like children, like those who always have something new to learn – learning also from difficulties, tribulations, disappointments.

If another person is simply a means for our own self-fulfillment, valued only in so far as they are of use to us, then they will always be

insufficient for us. In contrast, if we keep in mind God's unfailing love for us and the others, we will learn from that divine look of love how to love those around us better each day: like a small child learns from the loving look of its parents.

The secret of this life lies not in our being perfect, strong, pleasing, free of defects. The secret of life is to come to be loved in our own weakness and fragility, and to love others in their weakness and fragility. It is being able to say: I am faithful to the person I love.

Jesus is always close to us to help us in our weakness. Every human relationship is called to share in the experience of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. Each of us is called to give ourselves completely, to pour out our life in order to win life for the other person. Our greatness begins when, in Christ, we rise above

ourselves out of love, when we dare to give ourselves completely, with a total gift of self to the other person.

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