

OCTOBER 7, 2018

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 GN 2:18-24

Responsorial Psalm PS 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6

R. (cf. 5) **May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.**

Reading 2 HEB 2:9-11

Gospel

MK 10:2-12

The Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?" They were testing him. He said to them in reply, "What did Moses command you?" They replied, "Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her." But Jesus told them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts 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 flesh.* So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate." In the house the disciples again questioned Jesus about this. 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."

HOMILY:

As pastor, I feel some obligation to comment on issues of gravity in our world. For, since Jesus became fully human and made his dwelling among us, the gospel he proclaimed is meant to speak to all of human activity. And so . . . the Supreme Court Confirmation Process that came to an end this weekend. It of course would be easier, even safer, to ignore this radioactive topic, but does our faith have anything to say—to help us gain perspective and make any sense of this conflicted national spectacle? I offer these reflections to further the discussion and hope it will be received as an effort to reflect more deeply on a matter that has caught the attention of the nation.

In many ways, the display surrounding the confirmation hearings of Judge Brett Kavanaugh would be unthinkable outside the context of this last year's seismic cultural quake that has been labeled the #METOO movement. Beginning with the revelations of alleged and multiple assaults of women at the hands of the Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, and then cascading across political figures, celebrities, and across corporate America, women began to push back against not-always subtle acceptance of sexual harassment and abuse in their lives, of imposed sexual activity that has been condoned in some quarters as "the way it is," or even "the way it ought to be." No one would claim that this is anything but a positive development. With this cultural earthquake, we ought not be surprised that the question of sexual assault took a place front-and-center in the hearings.

At first glimpse, the 10th chapter of the gospel of Mark, from which we hear today, seems to speak about marriage and the Divine will that "what God has joined, no human being must separate." But it is about more than this—and I contend it speaks directly to what was going on in Washington DC. This teaching of Jesus is relevant for this last week in that he definitely is speaking about the importance and power of sexuality, and its proper ordering. He speaks of man and woman, husband and wife, becoming "one flesh," the biblical way to speak of sexual relations. He then commands us that "what God has joined together, no human being must separate." He means that the man and woman, "joined together," that is, married, are those who are to become one flesh in sexual relations, the properly ordered place of sexuality. How God has ordained that man and woman become one flesh

through the gift of sexuality and the sexual act, Jesus warns, ought not be separated by our choices. Becoming one flesh in other manners, for example outside marriage, is not God's plan.

Our Catholic tradition would teach that God's plan for life can be detected in what we call "natural law." When we act against how God has ordered creation, harmful and unexpected consequences will appear. Sexual assault is clearly outside Jesus' vision of man and woman "becoming one flesh." Some of the harmful and unexpected consequences of this have been vividly on display during this last year of #METOO and, in that context, came the eruption of accusations of sexual assault in the Kavanaugh hearings.

The contentious, divisive, disunited scene in the hearing room, in the streets of Washington DC, and across televisions of the nation and world, is part of the larger #METOO movement, which itself is part of the larger place of sexuality in human life. While the sexual revolution that surfaced in the 1960's proposed that sexual expression ought to be free and essentially unlimited, natural law has another thing to say. After nearly 50 years of this experiment in contradiction to the divine vision of sexuality, and with all of us secretly knowing that this revolution did not deliver anything but dissatisfaction and misery, the pushback is in full-force with the #METOO movement. The question, however, is this: push back to where? For the "push back" is not guaranteed to be without its own damage.

Most agree that there was much collateral damage from the eruption of the social corrective of the proper place of sexuality that has been the Kavanaugh hearings. Without any ability to know exactly what happened 36 years ago, we can see what has happened 36 years later: the exposing to the withering opinion of the whole nation of a woman who did not want to be exposed; the assault on the good reputation of a judge with charges that could find no corroboration; potential witnesses being pursued by a limelight they did not want; a wife and the children of the judge who suffer by association; other legitimate victims of sexual abuse who fear the potential of the revictimization and condemnation by what they saw in the hearing room and across social media; and other potential victims who fear false allegations of sexual abuse in the hysteria that can come in social revolutions like the one underway. The Kavanaugh Confirmation Process, this ugly display of disunity and division, must be situated in the context of a failed sexual revolution seeks cries out for correction in the voices of the #METOO movement—but a correction that is not without collateral damage.

"What God has joined together, no one must separate." Jesus speaks of the vision of unity and Communion in God for which all human beings have been created. When a revolution against this vision of human relationships and sexuality is embraced, such a revolution will have its most deadly results. On display this week were the aftershocks of a failed human revolution that has been called the "sexual revolution." I'm not here to be the judge the participants in the revolution—ultimately only God can do that. But our fidelity to the vision of human relations and sexuality will be our part in returning to the light and banishing the darkness. May our Communion in the Lord now received strengthen the faith, hope and love we need to follow on Jesus' way of Life. The failed revolution away from God's way of life in Jesus' teaching on human sexuality has resulted in profound suffering, disunity, conflict and suffering. It's all around us—if we'll have the courage to admit it. Let us follow after Jesus' way and join the push back. The chaste and faithful living of Jesus' teaching on human sexuality and love will be our way back to fuller Life.