

My Dear People of God,

Today we celebrate the 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time and readings invite us to reflect on a subject that has affected humanity since time immemorial, divorce! In fact we live at a time when divorce is common and acceptable in most countries and cultures. Its effects are also taking a toll on our society as lives and relationships are shattered by this scourge. Jesus Himself had to deal with this issue. In His response, Jesus makes a call for a return to the beginning, to creation.

The spiritual problem that Jesus confronts is the same spiritual problem that besets marriage today: people want easily out of a marriage without looking at the spiritual implications. Jesus calls it 'hardness of heart'. At the base of all of these problems is a real challenge: Do I have a true spiritual life? Am I marrying with the goal of spiritual life? Where does spirituality fit into my marriage? As a spouse, am I committed to developing the spiritual life with my partner?

Harold Kushner, the famous American rabbi, tells how a young couple came to see him one evening as part of their wedding preparation. During the meeting, the young man said to him; 'Rabbi would you object if we made a small change to the wedding ceremony? Instead of pronouncing us husband and wife 'till death do us part' could you pronounce us husband and wife 'for as long as love lasts'? We have talked about this and we both feel that, should the day come when we no longer love each other, it wouldn't be morally right for us to be stuck with each other. In response the Rabbi said; 'yes I object, and I will not make the change. You and I know that there is such a thing as divorce, and we know that a lot of marriages these days don't last until one of the partners dies. But let me tell you something; if you go into marriage with the attitude of 'if it doesn't workout, we can always split' then I can almost guarantee you that things wont work out for you. He went on to say; 'I appreciate your honesty, but you must understand that a marriage commitment is not just a mutual willingness to live together, but a commitment to accept the frustrations and disappointments that are the inevitable part of two imperfect human beings relating to each other.

When two people come together in the matrimonial covenant, their lives are linked together. From that point forward, they have a common destiny. They are committed to one another, and are responsible to and for one another. God seals and blesses this bond. God made us for love, to give and to receive love. However, the ability to love is not something that is given to the couple on their wedding day along with all other gifts. Love is something that has to be learned and grown into. The real journey married couples (and indeed all of us) have to make is the journey from selfishness to love. Nothing is a greater challenge to love, nothing provides a greater opportunity for growth in it, than marriage. The challenges and difficulties they encounter can become opportunities for growth in love especially love as defined by St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 13)

For any of us, the challenge of this Sunday and its readings is very simple: Is my faith alive? Do I really seek the living God? Does my life reflect a living relationship with God and a constant striving

to understand His word and put it into action in my life. Let us pray for those gifts. Let us pray for all who have divorced. Let us pray for the healing of the sufferings of those who have divorced. Most of all, let us pray for God to be known as a compassionate and loving God and may we reflect that compassion and love.

Thanks and God bless

Fr Simon Peter