

October 7, 2018

27th Sunday of Ordinary Time

My seminary classmate, Fr. Gueric DeBona, teaches homiletics where I studied at St. Meinrad in Indiana. He also writes commentaries on the Sunday readings. He wrote that the Gospel for today “represents a hornets' nest, ready to sting just about everyone in sight.”

The Pharisees want to sting Jesus, when they ask him about Moses’ teaching on divorce to test him. They are not asking to get clarification on what Moses taught; they are not asking to learn more about what Jesus teaches; they are asking to trip him up. What does Jesus do when the Pharisees throw him something that is negative? He calls them to task and says that Moses permitted divorce “because of the hardness of your hearts.” He then turns that negativity around by reminding them of God’s original purpose for marriage.

Today, we hear from the second chapter of Genesis, where God completes the goodness of Creation by making a suitable partner for the man he has created. God takes from the man's side, a rib, which also is a symbol that even though she is different from him, she is equal to him, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh and the two as they come together become one flesh. Their nuptial union is a sign of the union of love that God desires to have with all humanity.

When we keep reading Genesis, we find that Adam and Eve’s original sin disrupts God’s original plan of blessing that is symbolized in marriage. This is what the first option of the Nuptial Blessing in the Rite of Marriage says “by your plan man and woman are united, and married life has been established as the one blessing that was not forfeited by original sin or washed away in the flood.” God’s original plan of nuptial love was not forfeited, but it was damaged, and that affected the way that people live with each other. Adam and Eve were banished from paradise, Cain murdered Abel, and men divorced their wives--in the ancient world for an offense as simple as burning dinner. In that world, divorce often left women in abject poverty. Jesus was dealing not only with the negative attitude of the Pharisees, but also with the social injustice of divorce in his time. Jesus came to restore the original blessing. That is why he gave us the sacraments.

The good news is, there is power in the sacrament of marriage. The rate of divorce for Catholics who marry and live their faith actively is significantly lower than for those who have no religious affiliation or even those of other faiths. A 2013 study done by Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) found that the rate of divorce for Catholics who marry is 28%, while the rate for those with no religious affiliation is 40%. (When we are sharing with others why our faith makes a difference, we can certainly point out the difference that our faith makes in marriage.)

At the same time, there are good Catholics who suffer the pain of divorce. The 28% of all Catholics who marry and later experience the pain of divorce is not a small number. Most often when a parishioner whose marriage is in trouble comes to me, they want their marriage to continue, but their partner has already decided that they want out. Attending Mass can be a painful experience at what is often the lowest point of their life. What can we do for divorced or divorcing Catholics? One thing we must do is be a true friend to them, call them, take them out for coffee, include them in social gatherings. At St. Louise we also have the ministry of Divorce and Beyond, a support group for those experiencing divorce; and David Gehrig on our Parish Staff has more information about this. Of course, the ministry of annulments is available for divorced Catholics who would like to be free one day to remarry in the Church.

God created us, male and female, in His own image and likeness. God calls each of us to live actively that love with others, through our relationships, and in our families. That includes caring for those who suffer the pain of divorce