

To Divorced Catholics

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 7, 2018

Fr. Tony Davis

Whenever I first started doing weddings, I made it a point of being positive and upbeat. I wanted to be overly happy and feed into the excitement of the wedding day. Looking back, I now realize how naive I sounded. Just speaking about romance, the ideals of marital love, and living happily ever after was fake and completely missed the truth of what really awaited the newly weds. For many of you who are married or have been married before, you know what marriage is really about. I hope you would agree that there is a blessing involved, but also that married life, like anything else, has its challenges. Now when I do weddings, I still try to be positive, but not so naive.

Our readings today speak about both the positive and negative sides of marriage.

In our first reading from *Genesis*, we hear the positive side. It is the story of God creating an equal partner for Adam so that he didn't have to be lonely. We heard the excitement of Adam seeing Eve for the first time: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!" The two of them, in a certain sense, became the first married couple.

To those who have been able to preserve their marriage, you are a great sign to us of unity. For all the hard times you worked through, all the sacrifices you have made to stay together, all the love you have brought into the world, and for the family you have formed, thank you!

In our Gospel from *Mark*, we hear the negative side. It is Jesus' teaching on divorce. He is critical of it because it goes against the scripture passage that says, "the two shall become one flesh."

To those of you who haven't been as fortunate in your marriages, we want to especially reach out today to you. In *The Joy of Love*, in speaking about those in irregular marital situations, Pope Francis says that these people "should be made to feel part of the Church. They are not excommunicated and they should not be treated

as such, since they remain part of the ecclesial community... Language or conduct that might lead them to feel discriminated against should be avoided, and they should be encouraged to participate in the life of the community. The Christian community's care of such persons is not to be considered a weakening of its faith and testimony to the indissolubility of marriage; rather, such care is a particular expression of its love." (243)

Pope Francis rightly recognizes that leaving a marriage for Catholics usually isn't some great liberating experience, but rather is a painful one for either one or both of the spouses. As they go through that pain, what they need most is love.

A failed marriage does not exclude one from the Catholic Church, because the church should be a place of healing.

How sensitive am I to those who have gone through a divorce? Of course, we wish all marriages would last and we should do everything we can to build a culture of fidelity, love, and commitment. Yet, if we start excommunicating those who are in pain, then how will they ever learn to love again?