

Accepting Our Limitations as God's Child
October 3, 2021, Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel of Mark 10:2-16
Fr. Brad

Today's Gospel gives an account of an event in Jesus' ministry that illustrates how Scripture can be misrepresented. It happened in Jesus' time and it happens today in our time. In our human weakness we can allow ourselves to be baited by an interpretation of Scripture that suits our human preferences rather than awaken us to a more challenging, yet much authentic message for life.

As the Pharisees did by alluding to Scripture to justify divorce, the creation stories, a portion of one which is presented today, has also often been used throughout Church history, not as a lesson on the nature of relationship between God and God's people and all of creation, but as a defence of the abuse of power, be it humanity over nature or power differential between genders.

The creation story passage of today's first reading and from which our Gospel is drawn, is part of the second of two from the Book of Genesis. It informs us that through disobedience, humanity was somehow displaced from right relationship with God. It attempts to explain, through allegory, how this sense of alienation from God...this universal inner sense of exile and discontent within the human condition, came to be. By circumventing the instructive warning from God about not eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, a shift happened as humanity, through the actions of Adam and Eve, took that first step away from God. The consequences were immediate. A fracture in relationship has occurred. The ability to live in right relationship with anyone is now impeded somehow.

From the beginning, we were **created for relationship**. Our God is about relationship so when a relationship dissolves or breaks apart, there is misery because it runs counter to this natural desire within our hearts.

What gets in the way is sometimes pride and the impulse to go our own way without a proper road map or proper instruction. We see this in marriages where little to no preparation was participated in beforehand. We see this in other aspects of life as well when we depend solely on our own the answers and plow forward with an idea or feeling without measuring the cost or the long term effect it will have on us or other people.

People can thus marry for the wrong reasons and get divorced for the wrong reasons. Sadly, the children often pay a great price.

Do we invite God to enter into our marriages and other relationships?

Sadly, we live in a world where people too often follow their feelings and emotions as their ultimate guide and this is a shortfall. Feelings and emotions are a great gift, but are not our ultimate guide. Love is ultimately an act of the will. It is through prayer, education, patience and perseverance, life experience, and failures that we grow and mature in our faith. And in so doing we put ourselves in a better position to be less

prone to being lured by the world's fleeting invitations and pleasures that ultimately do not fulfill or sustain.

There is an element of **self-sacrifice** that is essential to a true loving commitment between two people. Jesus reminds the Pharisees that in marriage, 'the two have become one flesh.' He presents this level of faith and commitment as the ideal plan from the beginning. We all fail in this to varying degrees, but permanent commitment is always the goal of marriage; it is meant to be a representation of the permanence of love in the world and of the ongoing creative work of building relationships of love, a love that endures all things. That is the intention of creation. Though marriages do fail, we must not lose sight of the goal of love in the world.

We can choose to blame the world for all the clutter and misinformation that gets in the way of living out such an ideal. It is true that the world is much different than it was 50 or more years ago and it is ever harder for permanent relationships to be sustained. Community worship and faith education are not so much a part of the fabric of our cultural life today. There are ever changing attitudes toward sexual behaviour. The world is changing so quickly due to technological advances, changing lifestyles and life circumstances; so it is harder to make life long commitments to any one thing let alone another person.

We must come to acknowledge as well, that within our own hearts is a brokenness and an alienation that no worldly relationship can heal completely. Yet we must not throw in the towel concerning marriage.

Part of the concrete answer lies in prayer and support of married couples and those preparing for marriage; in providing an example of love for our young people, and especially our children.

It may also be helpful to remember that no matter how deep a friendship or a marriage is and no matter how good, there is no union that fills every emptiness inside us.

At the end of our Gospel, Jesus turns His attention, and thus ours, away from the Pharisees and toward the children. The children are a metaphor or symbol of powerlessness and they are welcomed into Jesus' arms.

Throughout our lives, we face barrages of contradictions, shortfalls and failures and we will continue to as long as we are in this world. We are helpless and ill equipped to solve it all ourselves. To receive the kingdom of God like a little child acknowledges our utter dependence upon God and forgoes the complications of trying to figure everything out ourselves. All we can do is simply offer ourselves to our God, helpless children, in need of guidance and love. And by we, I mean all of us, married, single, divorced, widowed, religious, indigenous, African American, (every race and creed), the aged, the traumatised, the marginalized, the homeless, the incapacitated, etc. We were all created for relationship with another.

We are all orphaned children who are alone in the world. Ron Rolheiser says it well, *'What we crave more deeply than sexual unity is moral affinity, to be truly one heart with another.... When we can accept an inevitable separateness, moral loneliness, and disappointment, we can begin to console each other in our friendships and marriages'*.

So firstly, **accept the reality of the inescapable aloneness of this world.**

Secondly, **embrace the teachings of Jesus in faith** and persevere.

Jesus' vision of marriage as a permanent covenant commitment comes not as a restriction but as an affirmation of a relationship built into the original blessing of creation.

In our broken world, people are pushed aside, put away or dismissed. Jesus never puts us away. He unites and brings together. At this Eucharist, He calls us to His Table where we re-enter and affirm that original blessing and become one body, one people.

May we allow Him to heal our broken and alienated hearts and restore us to wholeness.