

## GOSPEL

MARK 10:2-16

Some Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, 'Is it against the law for a man to divorce his wife?' They were testing him. He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?' 'Moses allowed us' they said 'to draw up a writ of dismissal and so to divorce.' Then Jesus said to them, 'It was because you were so unteachable that he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. This is why a man must leave father and mother, and the two become one body. They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide.' Back in the house the disciples questioned him again about this, and he said to them, 'The man who divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another she is guilty of adultery too.'

People were bringing little children to him, for him to touch them. The disciples turned them away, but when Jesus saw this he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I tell you solemnly, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' Then he put his arms round them, laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing.

## A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

This Sunday's Gospel reading offers us Jesus' words on marriage. The passage opens with the provocation of the Pharisees who ask Jesus if it is "lawful for a man to divorce his wife", as the Law of Moses provides. Jesus firstly, with the wisdom and authority that come to him from the Father, puts the Mosaic prescription into perspective, saying: "For your hardness of heart he" — that is, the ancient legislator — "wrote you this commandment". Thus it is a concession that is needed to mend the flaws created by our selfishness, but it does not correspond to the Creator's original intention.

And here, Jesus again takes up the Book of Genesis: "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'". And he concludes: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder". In the Creator's original plan, it is not that a man marries a woman and, if things do not go well, he repudiates her. No. Rather, the man and the woman are called to recognize each other, to complete each other, to help each other in marriage.

This teaching of Jesus is very clear and defends the dignity of marriage as a union of love which implies fidelity. What allows the spouses to remain united in marriage is a love of mutual giving supported by Christ's grace. However, if in the spouses, individual interests, one's own satisfaction prevails, then their union cannot endure.

And the Gospel passage itself reminds us, with great realism, that man and woman, called to experience a relationship of love, may regretfully behave in a way that places it in crisis. Jesus does not admit all that can lead to the failure of the relationship. He does so in order to confirm God's plan, in which the power and beauty of the human relationship emerge. The Church, on the one hand, does not tire of confirming the beauty of the family as it was consigned to us by Scripture and by Tradition; at the same time, she strives to make her maternal closeness tangibly felt by those who experience relationships that are broken or that continue in a difficult and trying way.

God's way of acting with his unfaithful people — that is, with us — teaches us that wounded love can be healed by God through mercy and forgiveness. For this reason in these situations, the Church is not asked to express immediately and only condemnation. On the contrary, before so many painful marital failures, she feels called to show love, charity and mercy, in order to lead wounded and lost hearts back to God.

Let us invoke the Virgin Mary, that she help married couples to always live and renew their union, beginning with God's original Gift.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Pope Francis explains marriage as a relationship where we are called to recognise, complete and help each other. In your experience of, or observance of married relationships, how is it a path to transformation and holiness?
- How has mercy and forgiveness been part of your experience of growing as a disciple of Jesus?
- What are the characteristics of children, that we should imitate as people of the Kingdom of God?

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.