

TWENTY SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (10/3-4/2009)

Genesis 2/18-24, Psalm 128, Hebrews 2/9-11, Mark 10/2-16

Jesus was unmarried - or so we infer from the scriptural tradition.

The argument goes that, were he married, surely his wife would have been mentioned somewhere along the way; after all, all the other family members are mentioned!

The Gospels do refer to his father, his mother, his “brothers” and “sisters”.

Nevertheless, celibacy was not a highly valued state of life among first century Jews.

That notwithstanding, this celibate rabbi from Nazareth has a strict interpretation of the laws on marriage and divorce: “*Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.*”

Church history says that that Jesus’ teaching on divorce was a real obstacle for many in the early days of the church; it’s safe to say it still is, especially as the number of divorces, even among Catholics (40%?) has risen dramatically in the past few decades.

The website “Catholic Ministries” provides a short summary of divorce concerns.

- . *Divorced Catholics are not excommunicated.*
- . *Divorced Catholics may receive Eucharist and Reconciliation.*
- . *Divorced Catholics are full members of the Catholic Church and may participate fully in the church.*
- . *Children will not be illegitimate if a divorced Catholic is granted a declaration of nullity.*
- . *Before a divorced Catholic can marry in the church, a declaration of nullity must be granted on the previous marriage.*

(A declaration of nullity affirms that the first marriage, for whatever reason, does not exist.)

So it might seem that new pastoral concerns have softened Jesus’ words a bit.

But we have to acknowledge that Jesus was truly stating the ideal for all marriages; he was confirming a biblical tradition stemming from *Genesis*.

Yet, in the face of the present reality, and the growing statistics, the church must continue to search out ways to help in this crisis.

Better preparation for marriage is obviously one avenue down which to go.

Most priests go through at least six years of formation before ordination.

For some engaged couples, besides the extended preparation for the ceremony itself and the reception afterwards, relatively little time is spent in getting ready for the long haul that real marriage is.

More quality groundwork and help needs to be offered in this area.

Moreover, we have to find additional ways to help married couples who are experiencing difficulties in their relationship; we have to communicate to them that “having problems” does not mean they are bad people, or that their marriage should be terminated.

Marriage is such an essential vocation and most people are called to it; for that reason, the church has to continue to preach and teach the holy and sacred nature of the marriage commitment.

We hear Jesus’ teaching; we acknowledge the problems; we seek solutions.