



October 7, 2012
Twenty-seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

*"...It is not good for the human to be alone."
Genesis 2:18*

Dear Friends;

The seventeenth century English poet John Donne wrote, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent." In other words we are part of something greater than ourselves we are part of the vast universe and are made for each other.

The first reading from Genesis is meant to tell us that humans are meant for a communion of life and love with each other and God. God completes his human creation by making maleness and femaleness. They are equal—"Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." And they form a community of love—one flesh. The Hebrew word for flesh does not just imply the body but the whole person—physical, psychological, emotional, sexual and spiritual.

Marital love from this perspective is a commitment to a process bigger than two individuals. In marriage a couple is committing themselves to serve God by enriching all of life: children, elders, the poor, and the natural world. Married persons and their children can be the nucleus of society that grows to be an authentic image of a loving God.

Throughout the history of the ancient Near East the ideal marriage partner is the child of your father's brother—your first cousin. People lived in extended family units. The woman most often lived with her husband's family in the house of her father-in-law. Marriages were not so much between individuals as they were between families. Many of the small villages of Galilee were communities of interrelated families.

Divorce in this situation was not merely the separation of individuals but of families. In this society driven by maintaining honor and avoiding shame divorce was disastrous. It brought shame on the bride's family and the bride's male relatives would be forced to defend the family honor. Feuding would undoubtedly result and escalate to bloodshed. (Some of this mindset is still prevalent in many cultures today) So divorce is to be avoided at all costs. So Jesus' pronouncement "What God has joined together, let no one separate" rings culturally true.

In Jesus' time marriage was also a way of protecting the vulnerable. Women in that culture rarely if ever owned property. If she did it was controlled by male relatives. Women had no means of independent support. So marriage guaranteed support for the most vulnerable in society—woman and children. Laws forbidding divorce were saying that women and children should not be left alone to fend for themselves.

Fr William Bausch says that in criticizing those who advocated divorce especially for frivolous reasons, Jesus was taking sides with the weak and vulnerable. Bausch says "He was not once-and-for-all condemning divorced persons, but was coming down squarely on the side of the defenseless. 'Don't do that to women!' is his stern message."

None of us is an island it is not good for us to be alone. We are made for a communion of life and love—in our families, in the Church and society. We are responsible then for justice, care of the vulnerable and strengthening the bonds that unite us. Today's readings challenge us to see how we can build up our relationships especially the ties of family.

Peace,

Fr. Ron

