

Twenty Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time-B

Mk 10:2-16

Dear Friends,

The religious leaders had no real interest in Jesus' answer about divorce. The status quo of male dominance was 100% in their favor. The women were considered property and had no rights. The only concern of the leaders was to draw Jesus into some problematic public statement.

As usual, Jesus cuts through the self-severing propaganda and focuses on the central truth of authentic relations in light of the coming kingdom of God. This is a deep plunge into reality contrast to superficial legal niceties of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Jesus' teaching was truly dealing with the prohibition of divorce. However, the substance of his message was earth-shattering and absolutely revolutionary. It was a cultural bombshell. It devastated the accepted dominance of the male and proclaimed the dignity and rights of women. The negative declaration, **“and if she divorces her husband, and marries another, she commits adultery.”** (Mk 1:12) sowed the seeds of *“the wheat”* against the *“the weeds”* of the monopoly of male-dominated structures of Jewish society. It is truly difficult to comprehend how radically transformative Jesus' words were in this statement. Woman is transformed from society's vision as a piece of property to a person with rights and dignity.

In this context, the prohibition of divorce is not some legal precept. It is an invitation into the ideal of the kingdom. The teaching on divorce is not to be trivialized. Likewise, it is not to be proclaimed with an inhuman rigidity. As early as Matthew and Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians, the first generation of Christians were seeking a deeper explanation of Jesus' teaching on divorce in light of our broken human condition.

The Church today needs to take the total message of Jesus and apply it with his characteristic compassion and sensitivity to the pastoral scene in modern society. The sacredness and singularity of the marriage commitment must pass through the prism of God's mercy and compassion for his sinful and broken people.

Because Jesus' reflection on marriage is rooted in his teachings about all human relations in light of the kingdom, Mark adds on the encounter with the children. As is the case so often, Jesus reprimands the disciples for their avarice. This time it is the rejection of the children. Again, we are dealing with the issue of equality. The kingdom has no exclusion in its welcome. It is for all. There are no "nobodies" in the kingdom. In fact, the children, in their simplicity and vulnerability, are great examples of the universal nature of the kingdom. The kingdom is for the undeserving. One does not earn the love of God. Children are a model of this.

The connection between the issue of divorce and the rejection of the children flows from Jesus' teaching on human relations. Jesus consistently called us beyond the legalistic formulas of the law. His was a message to embrace life in all relationships: with friend and foe, parent and child, husband and wife. All are included in the kingdom. There is no exclusion as in the patriarchal society or in the disciples failure to see in the children **"what you did for one of these least ones, you did unto me."** Mt 25:45)