

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, B – October 3, 2021 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 7:15, 8:30, & 11am Sunday Masses – 775 words

The Holy Bible begins and ends with marriage. In the very beginning, “it is not good for the man to be alone”, so God creates a suitable partner for him. God builds the concept of marriage into what it means to be human. All of us desire completion in another; all of us feel incomplete in some way without that. Yes, marriage is part of human nature, so we naturally tend toward it, and the overwhelming majority of men and women end up in the married state – not by virtue of a divine call, but by virtue of what nature seeks.

At the end of the Scriptures, in the Book of Revelation, we behold the “wedding feast of the lamb”. God’s plan and all of human history move toward that moment when he will celebrate his nuptials with us – when the saved will be united with him forever. Thus we see that earthly marriage is a foreshadowing of heaven: men and women leave their respective families to form new ones, and they become so intimately united spiritually and physically as to be “one flesh”; all the more total and lasting will be our union with God in heaven.

Christ thus warns against divorce in the gospel: “what God has joined together, no human being must separate”. Once we are united with God in heaven, so we will remain unto eternity. This is the deepest desire of our hearts. “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless, until they rest in thee”, St. Augustine said – each of us desires to possess God and to be totally possessed by him. Christ calls us back to marriage’s true meaning as a foreshadowing of eternity; in every age, it has been difficult to live this out.

Indeed, one of the greatest differences between earthly marriage and the heavenly nuptials – if I may be permitted to state the obvious – is that our earthly spouses are not God, nor are we God to them. We all fall far short of that, so there is never total fulfillment even in the happiest marriage on this earth. Every marriage thus requires commitment and effort, foreseeing both better times and worse, wealth and indigence, sickness and health. Come what may, Jesus challenges us to preserve the marital union until it is dissolved in death.

Yes, because marriage is not a divine calling, there is a sense in which a person could marry basically anyone and somehow make it work: we probably all know some who are living through that reality. Perhaps they chose badly; perhaps at some point there was a surprising personality change; maybe they had been influenced by others or by misguided ideals in their choice and have since gotten wiser – whatever the case may be, we know there are some that have had to decide to make it work in spite of the lack of fulfillment.

Whether a person chose his or her spouse well or badly or somewhere in-between, all do well to remember the truth from today’s second reading: namely, that Christ has called us all “brothers”. In becoming man he descended to our level; he shared in our estate; he suffered with and for us. He is always most interested in and concerned for each one of us and every aspect of our lives. He wants us to be with him forever in the wedding feast of the lamb, so he continually offers us his grace, his divine help, along the way.

The Church of course takes these teachings quite seriously. In many respects, the Catholic Church is the “last man standing” today when it comes to upholding the full truth of marriage. But more than teaching a truth that often is challenging, the Church wants to be close to all, no matter what their lived experience has been, with all the remedies that our Lord offers. All the recent popes especially have exhorted us in various ways to be agents of Christ in a broken world – a broken world that includes many broken marriages.

But along the way we do meet some whose experience of the Church in this regard has fallen short. Even in my own family there have been those who felt misunderstood, or who perhaps were given bad information or wrong impressions. Let's all consider those whom we might know in that situation, who might now be away from the Church as a result. And besides praying for them, let's ask the Lord for the grace to know how we might help them come back. For we desire that all be gathered for the wedding feast of the lamb!