**Reaction Paragraph-**

| October 03, 2021 |
| --- |
| **Hardened hearts**27th Sunday in Ordinary Time |
| **Reading from Mark 10:2-10** |

2 The Pharisees approached and asked, “Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?” They were testing him.3He said to them in reply, “What did Moses command you?”4They replied, “Moses permitted him to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her.”5But Jesus told them, “Because of the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this commandment.6But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.7For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother [and be joined to his wife],8and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh.9Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate.”10In the house the disciples again questioned him about this.

Other Readings: [Genesis 2:18-24](https://www2.americanbible.org/e/369561/search-Genesis/jn2vj/585032823?h=gi6wVLIVsZjsFk4LT9WL4fULieOpF_v3ITZLNWZUbyI%202:18-24/eng-NABRE), [Hebrews 2:9-11](https://www2.americanbible.org/e/369561/search-Hebrews/jn2vl/585032823?h=gi6wVLIVsZjsFk4LT9WL4fULieOpF_v3ITZLNWZUbyI%202:9-11/eng-NABRE)

## **Lectio**

The Gospel opens with a question posed by Pharisees who challenge Jesus to a public debate. They want to know what Jesus teaches about the possibility of divorce after marriage. In the Middle East an open question like this is a challenge to your honor. This one is a classic “gotcha” question, intended to shame Jesus by forcing him into a bad choice. Like any teacher questioned publicly in this way, Jesus turns the tables by responding to their question with one of his own. It is a familiar tactic of his, seen in many similar passages that show Jesus as a master of the question-and-response honor-and-shame encounter.

“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” Jesus’s response—“What did Moses *command* you?”—puts the Pharisees on the defensive. They must first reveal their own position in their reply that Moses “permitted” a man to write a certificate of dismissal (which would have to be reviewed by a council of elders before he could divorce his wife; see Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Jesus has them on the ropes! He tells the Pharisees that Moses agreed to this practice as a concession to hard hearts. Then he reminds them that it was not that way in the beginning. God’s perfect plan for marriage is laid out in the first two chapters of Genesis (he quotes from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24). Jesus concludes that “therefore”—logically, obviously—what God joins, no human being should separate.

The problem is with human beings. We are prone to a “hardness of heart” toward God’s plans. We want to do things our own way. God allowed for divorce in the law of Moses as a concession to our sinful nature.

Later, in the house and away from the crowds, his disciples have a question for Jesus about this teaching (Mark 10:10-12). Notice that away from the public forum the disciples can ask a direct question and get a direct answer. Their questions are not perceived as a challenge by Jesus. They want to understand the fullness of his teaching about marriage and divorce. Jesus is clear. Anyone who divorces his wife in order to marry another person commits adultery against her.

Marriages in biblical times are arranged between families. Divorce is serious and costly. Divorce strains the bond of both the married couple and the extended family on both sides. Jesus holds the standard for marriage very high and his disciples will have to do so as well.

## **Meditatio**

Marriage is hard work. Any married person knows and appreciates what it takes to keep a marriage bond active, growing, and intact. In the culture of our Western world we typically meet a potential mate, grow in love, and hope that our families will agree with our choice of marriage partner. In the Middle Eastern world of Jesus potential mates meet after careful arrangements. Their respective parents present their children to each other as perfectly suited for marriage, and then trust that the two will become one through the bond of marriage and the active support of extended family and the community of faith. Sadly, this sort of engaged support is not always present in our marriages today. This can put a couple at a disadvantage from the outset and can create strain on the marriage bond.

Jesus said that he would be with us always, even to the end of the age, and that where two or three are gathered together in his name he will be in their midst. In a Christian marriage two people become one. Jesus is present in that union. Dissolving that bond for any reason is serious business and should not be considered lightly. The disciples of Jesus understand this. In the parallel passage in Matthew’s Gospel, they respond to Jesus by saying, “If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry” (Matthew 19:10). Jesus sets the bar high and wants those who follow him to do their best to reach for that height in their married lives.

## **Oratio**

Two verses from the book of Joshua and St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians provide prayerful insight for marriage this week. Pray with them for your own marriage, for the marriage of your parents, your siblings, your friends, and even for your co-workers.

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9 NIV).

“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (Philippians 1:9-10 ESV).

## **Contemplatio**

“Because of the hardness of your hearts …” What does Jesus mean when he uses these words to explain why Moses wrote the commandment that allows for divorce (under strict circumstances) in Deuteronomy 24? This phrase will remind the disciples of the book of Exodus and the promise God makes to Moses that the heart of Pharaoh will be “hardened” so he will initially be unable to respond to the plagues that are intended to change his heart (read mind) and let God’s people leave Egypt (Exodus 4:21; 7:3). This “hardening of the heart” does not so much refer to God placing an impenetrable shell around the heart as to God’s repeated attempts to squeeze Pharaoh’s heart to see what is inside (like making a sponge hard). Is there anything within that might allow Pharaoh to respond to God’s messenger, Moses? Re-read the plague narratives this week (they begin in Exodus 7). They work! Slowly but surely God gets Pharaoh’s undivided attention and Pharaoh commands Moses and the Israelites to leave Egypt so that they can move on to the Promised Land.

Has your heart ever been hard? Do you recall times when God may have been “squeezing” you to see if there was something in you that could respond to a call? To a mission? To a particular need in the church? Use this week to be aware of the ways that God is getting your attention so that you can be ready to respond to God’s call in your life.