

Sermon - October 4, 2015, Pentecost 19

God Who Doesn't Give Up

Mark 10:2–16



Dear Friends in Christ!

The Gospel reading is the bases of for our meditation this morning. And the focus of the lesson is marriage.

Yet in today's society the definition of marriage has changed. There are many, young and older people who are choosing to live together rather than to make a commitment and seek God's blessing in marriage. Pornography is one of the biggest industries in the world. Casual sexual relations have become widely regarded as a recreational activity to be enjoyed

by any consenting adults. The number of divorces is escalating, and few children in so many families could be blessed with more but deliberately choose not to have them. And it is not only society but even church people have approved of this practice by saying: "Judge not."

God left us a beautiful gift in the picture of the family, but we choose to destroy it.

Society has been seduced first into doubt and then into disbelief of God's Word—his Word about family, about marriage, about children. All three are special objects of satan's hate because all three find their foundation in God's will and plan for the human race to bring us blessing.

And his tactic is that old question, "Did God really say?" It is the question the serpent asked Eve and that is always the first question by which Satan plants the seeds of uncertainty and doubt before he proceeds to flat out contradict God's Word to each one of us. Satan's tactics don't change.

Please hold this truth in your mind: The Holy Scriptures reveal God's plan for the human family. Marriage and family are not a social construct, something we dreamed up. We don't get to define them as we choose. You heard that today in the Old Testament Reading. Marriage was God's idea and his gift, not Adam's. He created the woman to be the helper for the man, so he would not be alone. He brought the woman to our first father and gave her to him, and Adam received her as a gift. Moses concludes: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24).

That is the Lord's will, the Lord's plan. Male and female, a man and a woman, given to each other, the nucleus of a new family, and from there the blessings flow: "Children are a heritage from the Lord. . . . Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!" (Ps 127:3a, 5a). Family is God's plan.

But you don't have to read very far into the Scriptures before you see this institution of the Lord, given for our benefit and blessing, under attack, the Old Testament tells us of polygamy, unfaithfulness, concubines, family dissensions, fights, murder, and bloodshed. The Scripture show us the damage inflicted on the human race by the tireless assault of satan on this good gift of God and our buying into his lies.

All of that had been going on already for thousands of years when the Pharisees came to Jesus in today's Gospel, trying to justify the mess people have done to marriage: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away" (vv 2–4). But Jesus explains that Moses permitted divorce only under certain circumstances but it is merely a concession to the hardness of the human heart. "...from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female . . . and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let not man separate" (vv 6, 8–9), Jesus says. God also spoke through the prophet Malachi when he said: "Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth." (Mal 2:15).

See what the prophet says, when a union of a man and a woman takes place with His blessings God gives them a portions of His spirit. Yet the disciples still struggle with what Jesus said, they did not comprehend what Jesus was saying, but Jesus teaches them: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (vv 11–12). Divorce and remarriage is simply adultery and contrary to the will of God expressed in the Sixth Commandment. He allows no gray area in today's Gospel.

Yet we know situations where divorce was probably the best way to solve a problem, and even perhaps prevent more sin. However we must not complain by saying 'why doesn't our Lord get that?' The Gospel text for today certainly tells us why.

Because your God doesn't "get" giving up on relationships. That would be contrary to his nature. "If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim 2:13). The Lord couldn't and wouldn't back off on his promises. They hold. They hold forever. And that dear friends, is good news for all of us.

Divorce happens Jesus said "Because of your hardness of heart." If you think about it, that's the only reason, hardness of heart.

But what does "hardness of the heart" mean? The dictionary defines *hardened* as: cold, insensitive, unfeeling, rigid and unyielding, less subject to change, (*The free Dictionary*)

The heart, in effect, is the whole person in all of his or her distinctive human activity as a thinking, planning, willing, feeling, worshiping, socially interacting being.

The Scriptures defines Hardness of heart as a negative condition in which the person ignores, spurns, or rejects the gracious offer of God to be a part of his or her life and his commands. A hardened heart dulls a person's ability to perceive and understand. It is the equivalent of spiritual retardation. And, of course, when the person is not living according to God's will, it is the heart that is described as darkened, rebellious, callous, unfeeling, or idolatrous. It is within the heart that God works.

People may harden their own hearts, in sinful rebellion, in bitterness over circumstances, or in sheer self-will, towards God and in turn towards one another. Now anything can spark a hardened heart, it can be as simple as coping with life changes, to intolerance with moods and character shifts, to the absence of pleasures and enjoyment

of one another, and can be from both partners or even just one can certainly end a marriage and destroy a family.

Some say, "well I just don't feel love anymore!" "I'm not attracted to him or her, anymore!" The question I ask in return is this, what have you done to restore love, what have you done to feel attracted again? What have you done to keep your wedding vows: "I, (so and so) in the presence of God and these witnesses, take you (.. so and so), to be my wedded (husband or wife), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy will; and I pledge to you my faithfulness."

Hardened hearts forget those vows and promises. There is the reason for many who are going through pain and sorrow even here right now! I pray for each one of you! And boldly say that you have been robbed of your happiness and the fruits of the vows you each exchanged before God, or at least before those who witnessed your wedding. But I can tell you and I think you know that too, that the Lord will not leave you alone or abandon. He will walk with you each step of your life, redeeming you each day, preparing you for the day of the wedding banquet in heaven. Please don't lose that! Because divorce can produce hardness of heart as well, and can easily move you to give up, even your faith.

Now to you married people, especially young ones. Please keep this in mind marriage is hard work, but the hard work I find is not so much in the things I have to do in my marriage but breaking the hardened heart towards my spouse or my children. I'm sure there have been days in which I love my wife, o yes, I love her to be a thousand miles away, but guess what, there are days in which she has felt the same way about me and more. Friends, there are no fairy tale marriages where all live happily ever after without work, hard work. And this is certainly true: All families are dysfunctional! Have you seen it? There is no family, no couple, and no marriage, that doesn't face any dysfunction in their lives. But here is the Good News: there is one who is Holy, pure and almighty that can deal with our dysfunctions, a Savior that can deal with your hardened heart.

Christ, our Lord Jesus comes into the flesh to win a Bride for himself, a Bride to whom he will be faithful forever. If our problem is a hard heart, God in the flesh, our Lord Jesus, has a tender heart that will be able to help to give you a heart of flesh.

As God put Adam to sleep and took from his side that with which he made the woman, so our Lord Jesus sleeps in death on his cross, and his tender heart is pierced. Then from that heart flows a fountain of blood and water (cf Jn 19:34). Long has the Church seen in the water and blood that flow from the pierced heart of our Lord a picture of both Baptism and the Lord's Supper, by which the Holy Spirit tenderly creates the Bride of Christ, the Church, and brings her to the Bridegroom. And that Bridegroom, your Jesus, is faithful to you, for his heart is not hard. He is faithful even when you have been faithless to him. He doesn't "get" divorce. Makes no sense to him, because in his heart is a divine love that simply is unwilling to let you go, unwilling to lose you, no matter what. It's the same divine love that had no patience with the disciples trying to block the little ones from coming to him for his blessing. "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them" (v 14). It's a divine love that simply doesn't give up, doesn't "get" giving up, and will remove any barrier between you and him caused by sin.

All of this, you see, is pictured in the way God—not we, not Adam, not our society—long ago designed the institution of marriage and the family.

God established marriage and family to be an image of His own unfailing commitment to you, His people.

Therefore, if there is anything in this sad world that can bring hope and a future to counter the mess we've made of marriage and in our marriages, because of the hardness of our hearts, it is the open heart of Jesus.

Come, taste it anew today by the forgiveness of your sins and the promise of a new life. He sends you forth forgiven and renewed to begin mirroring in your families and your neighborhood the divine love of your Bridegroom, who holds you fast and has become one with you forever.

He sends you forth to put your forgiveness into action. Today I call on men for commitment to love their wives. I call wives to be faithful to their husbands. I call on parents to be faithful to their children and children to their parents, but above all to be faithful to the Lord. Hardness of the heart begins because we are lukewarm with God, because we are not in the word and even then pray that the Holy Spirit be with you always.

Call on couples to enjoy one another in Christ, to grow in faith and in love and care for one another, but not just words but with actions, and not just actions but with words that mirror what Christ has done for you.

I call on you to have fun! We seldom enjoy God's grace as in a joyful manner, happy and fun, and can be at any age not just in our younger years.

But remember God gives you a new life in Christ, and with that life a different joyful life in the power of His spirit. God shows his people that life can be quite different from the accustomed, a new lifestyle that takes God's word serious, but that is beautiful.

It is a life given you by Spirit in your Baptism. And that life is so much better than we are accustomed too, much richer and full. For in there you have Christ who gives you a new life, God who never gives up! There is the blessing for you and your marriage and your family!

In His name, amen.