

October 6, 2024  
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Mark 10:2-16

The Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?" They were testing him. He said to them in reply, "What did Moses command you?" They replied, "Moses permitted him to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her." But Jesus told them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate."

In the house the disciples again questioned him about this. He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.

### **Background:**

Last Sunday in the Gospel Jesus' disciples were upset because there were people using the name of Jesus for healing who did not belong to their company. Jesus insisted that those who use his name for good things cannot then speak against him. The second section of the gospel addressed the importance of being aware of what causes a person to fall into sinfulness. And the last part of the Gospel followed that theme by addressing the effects of sinfulness on children. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, ..." (Mark 9:42ff)

There are only three verses between the end of last Sunday's Gospel and the text for this Sunday. "Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt becomes insipid, with what will you restore its flavor? Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another. He set out from there and went into the district of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds gathered around him and, as was his custom, he again taught them." (Mark 9:49-10:1)

Mark's community would have recognized that Jesus is in the location that was governed by Herod, the one who imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptist. They would also recognize that the Pharisees' question regarding divorce is not a simple request to hear Jesus' teaching on the matter, but an attempt to trap Jesus and diminish his status among the people. In the Hebrew Scriptures divorce is frowned upon but permitted.

Jesus' response to the question of the Pharisees focuses on the disparity between what is permitted and the ideal that God intends. Jesus states that God's intent from the beginning of creation is that husband and wife should be one. What God brings together as one is incapable of being divided. What Moses permitted was quite different. People commonly believed that God was acting through nature and through their cultural practices. Just as children did not choose their parents, children did not choose their spouse. God was responsible and acting to bring two families together through the marriage of their children. (Marriage was much more the joining of two families than two individuals.)

In the second part of the Gospel Jesus addresses the disciples, away from the crowd and the Pharisees. Here he raises the possibility for a woman to divorce her husband. This would have been quite shocking for his disciples. The Jewish culture would not have considered this as even a possibility. Women were valued for their reproductive possibilities. A woman and her ability to have children was understood as belonging to either her father or her husband.

In this culture, if a husband divorced his wife, shame was cast on the men of her family. The male relatives were expected to make the situation right even if that meant bloodshed. If a couple was found to be in an adulterous relationship, the husband of the woman was shamed. This male-dominated way of thinking could not conceive of adultery by a husband as a sin against his wife. Jesus' teaching would be a totally foreign perspective for the Jewish community. However, Roman law at the time did allow for a woman to divorce her husband. Jesus' perspective would have been difficult for his Jewish disciples to accept as representing God's perspective because it seemed to agree with their Roman oppressors.

The text offers no insight as to why the disciples prevented children from coming to Jesus. Instead, the text says only that Jesus was upset with the disciples' behavior. Nor does Mark tell us how it is that one should be like a child. Without an explanation or the context for Jesus' actions, the apparent intent is to show who Jesus saw value in. Jesus is treating those who had no status, in society or in the religious tradition of the day, as having value and importance in the eyes of God.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. What was the last wedding in your family? Are you aware of how the family of the bride and groom participated together in the celebration? What kind of impact on the two families do you think their marriage will have as it unfolds?
2. How has God brought significant people into your life at different points of your life?
3. Jesus seems to have deliberately traveled into the area where his cousin John was executed and seems to find insight in Roman culture for how God sees women's situations. What does this say to you about your image of Jesus? How does Jesus' action in the Gospel text speak to you?
4. What do you hear within yourself as Jesus in the Gospel distinguishes between what Moses permitted and what God intended?
5. What are you feeling within yourself when Jesus tells the disciples to let the children come to him?
6. In today's Gospel Jesus seems to be deliberately challenging where people of the day had become accustomed to making distinctions between man and women and adults and children. Can you take some time to talk with God about a place where God may be challenging you, where you are feeling called to challenge another, or some other thought that arose within you as you reflected on this Gospel?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com](mailto:fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com).

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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### **Excerpts from the readings for October 6, 2024, the Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**

The Lord God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him." So the Lord God formed out of the ground various wild animals and various birds of the air, and he brought them to the man; whatever the man called each of them would be its name.

The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all wild animals; but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man. So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The Lord God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man. When he brought her to him, the man said: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called 'woman,' for out of 'her man' this one has been taken." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh.

May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives. Blessed are you who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways! For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork; blessed shall you be, and favored. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the recesses of your home; your children like olive plants around your table. Behold, thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord. The Lord bless you from Zion: may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

Brothers and sisters: He "for a little while" was made "lower than the angels," that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering. He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin. Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them "brothers."

The Pharisees asked Jesus, "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?" They were testing him. He said to them, "What did Moses command you?" They replied, "Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her." Jesus said, "Because of the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this Commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate." In the house the disciples again questioned Jesus about this. He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.

### **Excerpts from Genesis 2:18-24; Psalm 128:1-6; Hebrews 2:9-11; and Mark 10:2-16**

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for October 6th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the opening part of the Gospel from Mark, Jesus responds when he is asked by the Pharisees whether it is lawful for a husband to divorce his wife. He tells them Moses allowed divorce because of the hardness of the hearts of his people. But then he says, "God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate." In the second part he tells the disciples, when they try to keep children away, "Let the children come to me. The kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." The other readings have additional references to women, wives, and children. The first reading from Genesis has the creation story of the woman, for Adam "bone of my bones," and at the end has the verse quoted by Jesus in the Gospel about the two becoming one flesh. Psalm 128 proclaims, among the many blessings, "Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in your home; your children like olive plants around your table." In the second

reading, from the letter to the Hebrews, “In bringing many children to glory, he made the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering. He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin; He is not ashamed to call them “brothers.”

Jesus teaches that from the beginning, the intent for marriage is for it to be permanent. When he then teaches his disciples to allow children to come to him, he has two points for them regarding the children. First, “The kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” This follows on what he said two weeks ago in the Gospel: “Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the one who sent me.” Jesus’ second point about children today is that people need to depend upon the Gospel and be obedient to it. “Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.”

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!