

## Homily for 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time 2018

As I hear the readings today I think of a man who comes home from work. His children are grown up and have left home. His wife has left him. It was not a bitter divorce. So he enters his house alone. He gets a beer and sits down to watch TV. Some time later sitting there weary after work he has a cardiac arrest and dies, alone. It is sad and not that uncommon to hear of that kind of outcome. It is an example of how difficult life can be and how even with the best of intentions a marriage can be so difficult. Whatever the reasons for the failure the grief and loss are real for everyone in the family.

You know of course, that the word “sex” has its origins in Latin meaning “to cut” or “to divide”. Sex is what divides us into male and female. There are two sexes even though the boundary between them can be ambiguous. It is interesting that this meaning is not what we usually think of when it comes to sex. It usually refers to the attraction between man and woman. It seeks to remove the division as two become one in sexual union, be complete once again. Sexual attraction is so powerful it is capable of overcoming that fundamental division between human beings. As such it is something that continues to confound us. For us, unlike other animals, it is love which is necessary to save us from our tendency to miss use or be overwhelmed by it.

The story from Genesis chapter two is a way of understanding that mystery, its origin and its power. Adam was asked by God to name all the animals. Which he did. But none of them were suitable as a helpmate. There was no mutuality between the man and the animals. God did not try to create a special animal as a mate. That would not work. So God “cut” the man into two parts. And fashioned woman. Now there was mutuality. The man could recognise the other as part of himself as it were. At last, he says, God has got it right!

The taking of a rib from Adam is not a story of male domination over women as sometimes it is read. Patriarchal cultures have used it to justify male superiority at times. There is no suggestion of power of one over the other in the first story of beginnings in Genesis chapter one. There it simply says in the image of God God created them. Male and female God created them. For us, our image is the image of the Trinity unity in equality. Therefore, for those of faith, there is an eternal destiny foreshadowed in the union of husband and wife. Real love can only be found in mutuality. This story has as more truth and wisdom than any scientific explanation of the origins of sexuality could give.

It is this story Jesus picks up in the Gospel. It is wonderful the way our Liturgy does not just put one text from the Bible before us. It puts a rich series of passages to remind us not to take things out of context. Jesus himself picks up on a contradiction in the Bible. Moses allowed divorce in the Torah. But Genesis tells of a bond that is deep and lasting. Jesus does not say Moses was wrong. Jesus like us today recognises the often enormous problems we can meet when it comes to our relationships.

Like Moses, the Church allows divorce because of those very problems. And again for us as for the disciples the problem becomes acute when remarriage is contemplated. What becomes of that original two who became one flesh? The Church today, like Moses and Jesus before, continues to seek a pastoral response to people in need. We see this at work in the Plenary Council 2020 as well as the Church’s response to the Royal Commission into the abuse of children and vulnerable adults.

Jesus faces the question of male dominion that was part of the problem. He simply levels the playing field. Male and female are equally capable of divorce and equally capable of adultery. It is not a male prerogative to initiate divorce as was assumed in the Law of Moses. It was not so originally.

Perhaps it is no coincidence then that right after speaking of divorce and adultery Jesus puts the case of a little child before his disciples. Children are often the first victims of failed marriages and partnerships. But Jesus is not idolising children. A child may be misused or abused by parents yet the child still loves them. It’s whole life may be damaged by the conflicting emotions at an early age. Jesus highlights the child’s openness to welcome what is good. The child completely trusts the adult to do what is good. Whatever difficult a situation we find ourselves having done the best we can we need to welcome and trust the grace and mercy of God like a child.

In another living room a man and his wife are sitting watching TV. The man says to his wife, ‘Just so you know, I never want to live in a vegetative state dependant on some machine. If that ever happens, just pull the plug.’ His wife gets up and unplugs the TV.

Fr Graham