

Bulletin Article Series on the Family - Week 2 - Marriage and the New Testament

As we continue our reflections on marriage and family life, we move to the New Testament and Matthew's Gospel. In chapter 19:3-9, we read, "*Some Pharisees approached [Jesus], and tested him, saying, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?' He said in reply, 'Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female and said, '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.'*" They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss [her]?" He said to them, "*Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery.*"

A few fundamental takeaways here. First, when asked about marriage and divorce, Jesus immediately refers to the Genesis texts we examined last week. So, if we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, then we cannot simply set aside Genesis if we want to be truthful to our profession of faith. Next, Jesus affirms that God the Creator designed only two sexes, male and female, and that these two sexes are the only proper subjects of marriage. Lastly, Jesus affirms that marriage is a lifelong union, "unless the marriage is unlawful" (more on that to come). It is also noteworthy here that Jesus also renounces some practices in the Old Testament as *concessions for a specific time*: namely divorce. By extension, we could also include polygamy here as something that was allowed for a time (as parts of the Old Testament) but certainly *not intended or desired* by God.

Interestingly, if you continue reading in Matthew 19, even way back in the time of Christ people protested the idea of a life-long marriage. That is, Jesus' own disciples go on to say, "*If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry*"! But Jesus doesn't back down at all on His teaching. He instead replies that there are 3 good reasons not to marry: because one is born incapable of marriage (think of those with physical or psychological challenges), because they have been made unable to marry by the others (think of those who cannot find a suitable spouse or have been abandoned by their spouse), or because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom (as in priesthood and consecrated life). There is much that could be said about these 3 reasons not to marry, and there will be much more to say in coming articles on the many challenges that marriages face. But to conclude for now, we can say that Jesus, the Son of God, explicitly affirms the vision of marriage designed by the Creator in the beginning, as we read in the Book of Genesis.

God bless you,
Fr John