

St Pius-St Anthony 27th Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2nd

It'd be understandable if your reaction this morning to the Pharisees in the gospel would be asking, "Are the Pharisees serious? They seem disingenuous." So often, when they come to ask questions of Jesus, I wonder, "What is it, that they are up to?" Recall that they are established teachers & authorities within the Judaism of their time. They have training in such matters. I find that Jesus replies to them at times showing such a skepticism about their motives, such as when he tells them, "You know the Law-what are you asking?" (Luke 10:26) Such exchanges like these I think serve to reveal the hearts of everyone involved, especially over such emotionally sensitive matters, this issue today of Jesus prohibiting divorce & remarriage. It is vital that we realize Jesus' heart is at an entirely different place than that of the Pharisees. He is not into beating down already hurting people, suffering through broken or breaking marriages. Now that can't be said about the Pharisees who are exploiting the pain of divorced persons to score points and discredit Jesus here. If we review their exchange (back & forth), what do you think? Are the Pharisees interested in protecting the sacred bond of marriage-this institution of family life; do they wish to help fix broken marriages, & heal hearts suffering from marital strife? They are the ones bringing marriage & divorce up. Why, do they want to begin a marriage healing ministry? No, we can safely doubt that. In the gospel text, Mark clearly tells us the Pharisees ask Jesus a question about divorce ***'to test Jesus'***. So, what is the test here? Sadly, the Pharisees don't care about suffering families in troubled marriages, they are only using this topic to further attack Jesus, like vultures feeding on the real suffering of separated couples to make themselves look good in the eyes of the crowd. They are using the pain of people who are suffer through failed or failing marriages. As usual for them, they want to look good by making other people look bad. Sadly, they are trying to separate Jesus from Moses. They are trying to create a wedge between Jesus' teaching and the revered ancient (they think) teaching of Moses. They use the issue of divorce to discredit Jesus in people's eyes: they are profiting on other people's pain. ***Jesus knows this.***

The Pharisees even give away, as to what they are up to, when they ask, "Is it ***'lawful'*** to divorce....?" (Mark 10:2). Today we would answer such questions people ask about 'lawful things' by saying, "Keep in mind, just because the law allows something, doesn't make it right-good? It should, but it doesn't- look at some of our own country's laws- that abortion be the law of the land- its legal, but not moral-not good (many more examples could be given-think of business bankruptcy laws that cheats small contractors out of their due pay, or governors/presidents who pardon friends when average folks don't even get cases looked at, or injury court settlements that don't ask victims for their input,

crime plea deals of the rich and famous worked out behind closed doors-when does it end? It is all legal, but not good, it is lawful but immoral). So Jesus knows that the Pharisees are not interested in supporting marriage as the foundation of society-that stable, lasting marriages are what cultivate the safest places for our young to develop within. The Pharisees are not interested in healing and helping couples save marriages, recover from breakups. No, they are only using everyone who has suffered in bad marriages to win an argument over Jesus.

But don't we love our patient Lord. Jesus tries to get through to them, without further dragging hurting people (victims of broken marriages) through more mud. He says, "What did Moses say?" Of course, Jesus knew that Moses had allowed it (but unfairly, only a man could initiate divorce, and for any selfish convenient reason-even to justify him getting a newer model wife). Jesus challenges the Pharisees by saying, "Why only consider Moses an authority; let's go to the source-God. How did the Creator, in the beginning, set this human project up?" Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24, 'male and female...', indicating that God created them with natural complementarity to further grow the human family, allowing family to flourish through the birth/raising of children in a (& here's the key to it) ***stable, long-lasting safe loving protective home life***. So, marriage needs the length of a safe supportive period for children to learn how to live and love among one's own kin. So, yes, that would be a 'no' from Jesus to convenient divorce for superficial motives (refuting Moses!). But again, (of course, Jesus' heart is always with those devastated by the sins of abuse or abandonment-Jesus knows that there are cases of broken relationships through no fault of one party-and Jesus would work through, healing those hurts with them. So what is the reading today telling us? That first we have to go to start with the heart of Jesus Himself. Jesus knows and understands us-our story. In situations of broken apart marriages, everybody hurts- Jesus doesn't want hurt. It's safe to say today, that everyone is somehow affected directly with the pain of divorce. (If not ourselves, having been through divorce, then we have a parent, sister, brother, son or daughter who has.) who doesn't know the messy hurt of divorce. There is plenty of guilt and bad feeling to go all around as it is strewn all across the place (Grandparents too, suffer through contentious custody issues just like parents do—and friends get pulled apart over misunderstood loyalties having to pick sides). And Jesus is aware of all this as the Pharisees bring this to him; so He wants a reset to the whole question. I hear him saying, "Let's work to keep it all together-work for a world where divorce doesn't happen" (Sure, spousal or child abuse is an entirely different ballgame!) But let's all try to hold marriages together (everyone has a part to play in supporting couples to work it out. Yes, it takes strength and hard work, but to see it through and keep the bond intact, preserving and rescuing marriage is what Jesus is after. And why again, but because God created it as an **exclusive lifelong bond for children's protection**.

Which splendidly brings in the gospel's second part today (that maybe people think is unrelated, but it is crucial to the context of Jesus' marriage teaching) We protect marriage because of the 'little ones'. Who hurts most from the broken relationship of husband and wife- the children. This is why Jesus lifts the child up, blessing & puts him in the center of the group, saying 'the kingdom belongs to this one- it is for the children'. Jesus is saying "Keep the children at the center of marriage discussion-think of their good, their healthy growth, their continuing to go to Jesus." He says "Do not hinder the children" So we all have a lot we can do to work for better marriages, preserving them and supporting them, especially struggling ones. But it starts with placing the children in the center (think of them- keep their protection central), as Jesus did, and of course, keeping his heart as our guide.