

Read

Genesis 2:18-24

Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6

Hebrews 2:9-11

Mark 10:2-16 or 10:2-12

LIVING THE WORD

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 3, 2021



REFLECTION

Today's Gospel is a difficult one; there's no way around it. The Pharisees test Jesus on the laws of divorce. People who experienced divorce in their families may wince when this passage is read from the pulpit. Divorce is a reality in so many families today. Each situation is unique. Sometimes, marriages do not work out because of infidelity, abuse, absence, or dishonesty. Sometimes there is no ill will, but the couple grows apart. Each situation brings about its own pain for the individuals, their families, and communities. As a Church, we are called to accompany all people, with particular care for those who are suffering on the margins.

Church teachings on divorce get messy; there are many details and legalities to deal with. On the human level, though, we see that sometimes people who experience divorce are made to feel unwelcome in their parishes or schools. This is always wrong. As a Church, we are called to love and care for one another in good times and in bad. Jesus' teachings throughout the New Testament are clear: do not judge. Love your neighbors. Practice mercy and forgiveness. Jesus wants us to know without a doubt that God's love wins in the end.



ACTION

Divorce can be a very isolating experience for the couple as well as their children. Reach out to a friend or classmate who has experienced divorce in their family. Let them know you are there for them. Offer to listen if they want to talk or simply offer a shoulder to cry on. If this person is really struggling with their situation, suggest they talk to a school counselor.



"Never Alone"

—Tori Kelly, featuring
Kirk Franklin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVMRvVBZgLA>



QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How has divorce affected your life, if at all?
- ❖ What do you wish the parish community knew about your situation?



October 3, 2021

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #140B

Genesis 2:18-24

Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6

Hebrews 2:9-11

Mark 10:2-16 or 10:2-12

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

Today's Gospel reading records yet another confrontation between the Pharisees and Jesus. This time, the Pharisees are questioning Jesus' loyalty to the Jewish Law of Moses when they ask him about divorce. Jesus references the account of creation that we find in Genesis 2, specifically the verses that unites man and woman in marriage as "one flesh." Jesus' teachings are in continuity with a theology of creation and the Old Testament narrative. However, Jesus disagrees with Moses' allowance of divorce, explaining that this teaching was made due to the hardness of the Israelites' hearts.

Q FOCUS: *When we are open to God, we become more open to seeing other people as made in his image and likeness.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

On October 4, the Church celebrates the memorial of St. Francis of Assisi. Francis gave up a life of luxury, as the son of a wealthy merchant, in order to follow God's call for his life. He put the needs of others first and lived simply in order to provide for them. He worked to build the up the Church on earth, being a witness for conversion and reviving the spiritual life of many people. He is popularly remembered for his love and care of creation, and many parishes have a blessing of animals on his feast day.

Church Teaching Connection

The Catholic teaching on marriage remains rooted in Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments. Today's Gospel is an important reference for the Church's teaching against divorce. Marriage is considered a sacrament when it is celebrated between a man and a woman who are both baptized. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, divorce disrupts the intention of the sacramental union of marriage and is a cause for sin (see 2382-2386; 1601-1666).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 10:2-12

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

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 a husband 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 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."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Once again, the Pharisees are testing Jesus, concerned with questions about religious law. They want a direct answer, and they are likely waiting to hear whether he will retain the Law as found in the Torah or betray the tradition of Moses. Jesus shocks all of those gathered, including the disciples, by instituting a law stricter than that of Moses: Jesus' theology of marriage outlaws divorce.

► **What reasoning does Jesus give for outlawing divorce?**

► **If divorce is wrong in the eyes of God, why did Moses teach that it was permissible?**

Jesus proclaims that Moses allowed divorce "because of the hardness of [their] hearts" (Mark 10:5). In other words, the Israelites' stubbornness and pride affected this law. Even Moses could not break through the cultural and societal traditions that were present at the time. The phrase "hardness of heart" would have sounded familiar to the Pharisees; in Exodus, Pharaoh "hardened his heart" time after time, growing more and more stubborn in his resolve to not free the Israelites (see Exodus 7–11 for the story of

the plagues, during which Pharaoh hardened his heart against Moses' requests). This, of course, culminated in his (and many other Egyptians) death as Moses led the Israelites to freedom. Sometimes we harden our own hearts toward others and even toward God.

► **When have you hardened your heart toward someone? Some examples might include closing yourself off to making a new friend, not sharing with a family member or a friend, and so on.**

► **When have you hardened your heart to God? What caused this hardening, and what opened the relationship back up again?**

Jesus roots his teaching in a theology derived from God's creation of human beings. He recalls the Genesis description of a man and woman united as "one flesh" (see Genesis 2:21–24). What does this message mean to us? First, it shapes Catholic teaching on marriage as a sacrament of union, blessed and bonded by God. Second, more broadly, Jesus' teaching calls us to be seekers of unity even when we feel our hearts hardening.

Consider the example that came to mind when you were asked about a time when you hardened your heart to someone. You, like Moses, allowed exceptions to be made rather than doing the difficult work of seeking unity. This happens from time to time in our journey of discipleship. However, we are called to welcome all, sowing sacred bonds of connection and love, rather than allowing discord and disunity to grow. We can turn to Genesis, as Jesus did, and be reminded that all people are made in the image and likeness of God (see Genesis 1:27).

► **What are some ways that you can approach people and situations with a "softened" rather than "hardened" heart this week? How do the practices of Christian charity and love help us to do this?**

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the “Church Teaching Connection” on page 38.

Jesus expands the Mosaic teaching on divorce, challenging all to root themselves in God’s original message.

Moses’ teaching was due to the Israelites’ “hardness of hearts.” We also sometimes harden our hearts to God and to others.

Christians are challenged to soften our hearts, seeking love and unity with all.

Act on the Word

Understanding Church Teaching

For this activity, you will need to do research on the Catholic teachings regarding marriage and divorce. See the “Church Teaching Connection” section at the beginning of this week’s session and read through the various sections suggested in the Catechism of the Catholic Church to familiarize yourself with these teachings in order to help the teens understand this topic. It might be helpful to have copies of the Catechism available for the young people to reference during this activity.

Lead a discussion on the Catholic teaching on marriage, divorce, and annulment. Sensitivity to the young people’s experiences, families, and diverse viewpoints will be important to this activity. It is important to make this clear to the teens, and encourage them to adopt a similar attitude in their comments during this discussion. You may prefer to facilitate small group discussions before a large group discussion, depending on group size. Use the following questions to guide your conversation.

- ❖ Why do you think divorce so prevalent in society and particularly in American culture?
- ❖ What sort of interventions could lessen the divorce rate?
- ❖ Some say that the Catholic teaching on divorce is countercultural. Do you agree? What makes it seem so radical?
- ❖ Perhaps your family or families you know have been through divorce or annulment. How would you respond to someone who is Catholic and divorced (keeping both a softened heart and the Catholic teaching in mind)?
- ❖ How does today’s reflection on the Gospel help you approach other Church teachings that might seem radically different than society’s standards?

Closing Prayer

*Eternal Creator,
you desire that all creation might find
perfect unity in you.
Rescue us from anything that fosters
destructive human divisions.
Draw us together as one through Jesus Christ.
Who lives and reigns with you in the
unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday’s Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.