

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

Sunday 3rd October 2021 - 27th Sunday in ordinary time

Readings (Year B): 1st: Genesis 2:18-24 Psalm: 127. 2nd: Hebrews 2:9-11.

Gospel: Mark 10:2-16.

Lord & Lady Longford, well known in most of our lifetimes, were married for about 70 years. Not long after Lord Longford died, Lady Longford was asked in a TV interview, with such a long time together, had she ever thought of divorce. She answered, her voice ringing round the studio: Divorce: Never. Murder: Often!

We are all aware that we have all lived and are living still through a revolution in the whole area of relationships, marriage, sexuality, partners. A very different world from that of our parents and grandparents.

A prevalent view today is that divorce or separation can be amicable and reasonable, which of course is preferable to complete breakdown. But also that it is painless and civilized; that is; the process is legally smooth and financially uncontentious, and both parties can remain on speaking terms. However, for many the experience is brutal and painful as lives are torn apart. That has always been part of married family life.

As we know many reject the commitment of marriage and just live together.

Marriage is an institution known in all societies and all religions across the globe, which I think points to a divine institution, which is church teaching. Marriage is God's plan for all the human race. It is a gift of love, and normally it is because the couple have fallen in love with each other, and wish to seal that love in the covenant of matrimony. Every couple I've married over 53 years, all agree, and would hope that to be so throughout their lives together. Would that life were so easy!

As we hear from the first reading, which Jesus picks up, monogamy was God's plan: a man and a woman become 'one flesh'.

The question of divorce was among the most divisive issues in Jewish society, and in Jesus' day there was a great diversity of opinion about the

legitimate reasons for doing so, which prompts the question of the Pharisees to Jesus, once again testing him.

As ever he throws it back to them; what did Moses command? We hear their answer, but Jesus says it was because they were so unteachable that he takes them right back to the beginning in Genesis. Jesus cites that to emphasise that husband and wife are equal partners in the covenant of marriage. The language of Genesis indicates that the Creator intends for the marriage union to possess the same special covenantal nature as God's covenant with Israel. It is sacred.

The tragedy of the Fall in Genesis continues as we all experience evil and discord both within and without.

From the beginning the marriage union has always been threatened by discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy and conflict that can escalate into hatred. Love and hate are very near and can soon turn from one into the other. That is life and that is reality.

But it is good that we hear that by God's grace couples partake in restoring God's original order of creation as they try to live together in covenant and unity.

There is a very real way in which the entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love Christ has for the Church, the Bride of Christ. Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loves the Church and gave himself up for her. And just like the Christian life we always have to be working at our marriage. Taking each other for granted etc. does not work.

Last words from the Catechism: 'It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves and taking up their crosses, (i.e. crossing myself out) that spouses will be able to receive the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ'.

Canon Philip Dyson

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