

Homily for 27th Sunday in ordinary Time Year B
By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD
Readings: Gen 2:18-24; Ps 127; Heb 2:9-11; Mk 10:2-12
Theme: Male and Female He Created them!

In response to the question of divorce, Jesus says in the gospel, ‘from the beginning of creation God made them male and female.’ Jesus’ return to the creation of the first man and woman is vital for understanding our sexuality and the institution of marriage.

In the gospel, the question of the Pharisees showed the bias and discrimination against women. They said, ‘is it against the law for a man to divorce his wife?’ that Moses had commanded them to issue a writ of divorce to the woman. The woman had no equal right in divorcing her husband. Jesus had to set the records straight. Moses gave them the law of divorce because the people were unteachable. Jesus then takes them back to the book of Genesis, highlighting that God created the man and woman equal from the beginning. God instituted marriage, intending unity and indissolubility.

Our first reading is from the account of creation in the book of Genesis chapter two. In chapter one, the author gives a panoramic view of creation, then get into the details in chapter two. God created Adam, male and female he created them (Gen 1:27). Then, the author goes into detail about how God created them. He first formed the man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils, and the man became a living being (Gen 2:7). God then brought the animals before the man, to name them to see if any could be his helpmate. But there was none fit for him.

God was concerned about Adam and said, ‘it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helpmate.’ The Hebrew word, *עֵזֶר* means ‘a piece in equal parts,’ or ‘solitude,’ or ‘to be alone.’ It was as if the man was a piece and needed an equal part to be complete. The word *עֵזֶר* in Hebrew means ‘help, support or helper.’ And *קַנְיָן* means ‘opposite, counterpart,’ or ‘corresponding to.’ God wanted another creature corresponding to the man to compliment his piece because the animals did not meet that need. Adam naming the animals indicates that God gave him control over all of them. God already gave the man and woman this control over all creatures in nature, including the animals (cf. Gen 1:28-30). Of all the animals, there was no suitable partner for the man. Hence God had to make for him support just like him, equal in dignity, a helpmate. God formed the woman from the rib of the man. The rib is on the man’s side, which explains the equality and complementarity that God wanted them to share. They are to walk side by side and not in an oppressive relationship.

When the man saw his new partner, he exclaimed, ‘this, at last, is bones of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman.’ The man sees the woman as an equal partner – the expression bone and flesh refer to that sameness and complementarity. The woman fills the vacuum God intended in two ways – to complement and support. The man, in Hebrew, *ish*, said she shall be called *ishah* because she was taken from the man. The man leaves to join the wife, to become one body. Here God instituted the sacrament of marriage. They are one body, not two, when they are united and complement one another. The creation story shows that God created man and woman to complement one another and never that the woman is subjected or trampled upon by the man.

Jesus’ response to the Pharisees stresses that both partners in the marriage have equal rights. However, he underscores that neither the man nor the woman does something right in instituting a divorce against the other. But are there cases where divorce is allowed? In the Catholic Church, we talk about annulment, which means a marriage never existed if it was based on faulty grounds. However, suppose someone is in an abusive relationship. In that case, the church can allow for separation to save the life of the victim. We pray today for couples and families experiencing challenges in their marriage.