

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Genesis 2:18-24

God's Model for Marriage: Commitment, Companionship, Children, and Chastity

Today we learn the four "c"s that sum up for us God's model for marriage, introduced to us first in the text before us and expanded throughout Scripture: commitment, companionship, childbearing, and chastity.

Marriage is at its heart mutual **commitment**. Man and woman leave father and mother and become one flesh. They cleave, or separate, the relationship to their parents and cleave, or join, to each other. While they still honor and respect mom and dad, they are now a new unit, a new team, a new family responsible first and foremost to each other, making their own mutual decisions and pursuing their own mutual dreams.

This commitment is permanent. They become one flesh. To take a cleaver to that which is to cleave as one flesh is to fill a body bag. This commitment is public and known to all. A secret marriage is not a marriage, just as a secret inauguration is not an inauguration and a secret ordination is not an ordination. Marriage is a public act that affects both church and state, and thus must be announced to church and state. As God presided at the first marriage, so clergy or magistrates preside at marriages in our own day.

Marriage is commitment, not champagne and eighties music, as much as I like both. Those who would delay marriage to prepare the party make the same mistake many make with Baptism, delaying what God would have them do because they think they must dress up with human trifles that actually bears God's blessing in order to make it mean something. But, marriage, like Baptism, means something, not because of how we dress it, but because God has placed His blessing upon it. And marriage costs nothing more than the license, which is less than a month's cable, and, I would wager the pastor would even pay that if it was too big an obstacle.

No matter how sincere the couple living together may be in their love and their intentions, cohabitation is not marriage, and, whether they are honest about it or not, there are reasons the couple has not chosen to marry, and, unfortunately, those reasons are almost always at the core rooted in themselves and not in faith. One cannot claim the blessings of marriage before accepting the responsibilities. You don't get a jersey until you make the team; you don't get the companionship and chastity of marriage until you make the commitment.

I could have played pastor all I wanted to before I was called and ordained, but I wouldn't have been a pastor, and my play pastorate, even though I was doing the same things a real pastor would do, would have been an offense to God. The call and subsequent ordination are not pieces of paper; they are the voice of Christ spoken through the Church by the Holy Spirit. But the call and ordination do come with pieces of paper as well. Marriage is not a piece of paper; it is a lifelong commitment publicly proclaimed by the couple and acknowledged by the presiding minister. But marriage comes with a piece of paper as well, a document that records for church and the state the binding, public, and lifelong commitment declared by the couple.

Many might claim this view is outdated, burdensome, and disadvantageous, I would challenge them to prove it. Has society advanced with the disintegration of the family? Have women benefited as men forsook their proper roles and duties, with the full acceptance of the world, moving from live-in to live-in, signing their roses to each with "Love always," just to leave without a care or reproach when feelings change or girlfriends wrinkle or nag? We sign contracts for everything from dishwashers to cell phones, so why would we be unwilling to make a similar promise to each other? What is more valuable? What is more essential? In such circumstances, how can we not wonder where one's sense of perspective has gone? God is not the only one to tell us this. Clear statistics do as well.

Husband and wife are to be **companions**. The word for helper in our text is used of God as well in the Psalms. God's relationship with us is not temporary. Not, the notice of His promise love and faithfulness has been nailed to a tree for all to see. And man and woman, made for each other, are to love and serve each other as God has loved and served us in Christ. Companionship is not watching television at the same time, although

there is nothing wrong with that. Companionship is supporting and upholding each other, with each supplying and supplementing what may be lacking in the other, that. As one flesh, they are stronger than as two. They belong to each other, not as possessions, but as helpmates. God did not take Eve from Adam's head, that he might lord his headship over her, or from his feet, that she might usurp his headship, but from his side, that husband and wife might stand together and for each other.

This newly established arrangement in Genesis also provides a healthy home for **children**. Genesis 2 is an expansion and explanation of Genesis 1, and in Genesis 1:28 one of the chief purposes for creating man and woman is given: *"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number.'" Children are a blessing from God, and are to be viewed that way. While some marriages may not be blessed with children for medical or psychological reasons, in normal circumstances children are a blessing inseparable from marriage. We do not pick and choose God's blessings; we receive them. God does not say how many to increase by, but He does say to increase, and this is not a request, but a command. The Christian family will treat their children as Christ views them in the Holy Gospel today: as gifts to be loved with the same love with which God has loved us. The Christian family will rejoice to know they've been blessed with the awesome privilege of populating heaven as they produce the new life that God sanctifies at the font.*

Marriage provides a safe, stable, and God-pleasing arrangement, not only for children, but for sexual intimacy as well. Each partner's body becomes the others. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:4,5: *"The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone, but to his wife. Do not deprive each other, except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."*

Each partner is a gift to the other for pleasure and for protection from temptation. **Chastity** is not celibacy, and celibacy is not necessarily chastity. One is chaste when one enjoys what God has given in the way that God intends. Because of the emotional, physical, and psychological, and reproductive nature of sex, the marriage alone provides the setting in which God would have us enjoy this blessing, not for His good, but for our own. Any other setting is a misuse of this gift that can only do harm, just as using the baseball bat mom or dad gave you for Little League to break someone's head open is a misuse of their gift to you.

St. Paul speaks directly to those couples who are unable to restrain their sexual desires in 1 Corinthians 7:9: *"But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."* Any sex without the lifelong commitment of marriage is glorified prostitution, as each person turns the other into a commodity, given in exchange for fleeting pleasure or counterfeit love. St Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, *"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."*

It is a marvelous wonder of God's love revealed to us here in Genesis that we might imitate and perpetuate that love in wedded harmony. Marriage is called a mystery in the Scriptures because God holds it in such regard that He uses it as a picture of His love for us in Christ. Christ is thus declared our groom, having married the Church, signing His commitment in His blood. He has loved you selflessly, as His own Body, and forgiven your every stain and blemish. He does not throw your sins back in your face. He takes them on Himself as His own.

And that is the love that drives the Christian marriage, as spouses forgive as they been forgiven and love as they have been loved. That is the love that drives the Christian family, as we, made sons and daughters of the heavenly Father, as parents care for their children as our Father has cared for them. May we always treasure God's gift of marriage and the family by treating it like a treasure, a gift of God, given for our good and

the good of our society. And, as Christ's bride, may we receive today what our husband freely gives us: forgiveness for our failures in this regard and support in our commitment to do better in the future. Amen.