

***Twenty-seventh Sunday Per Annum (B)***  
***October 4, 2015.***

*This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken (Gen. 2:23).*

Our first reading from the Book Genesis directs our attention to the very beginning of our existence; man and woman created in God's image and likeness to share God's own life. *The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it (Gn. 2:7).* And God created for man a *helper as his partner*; and the man said: *This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken (Gen. 2:23).* The union and the equality of man woman are in God's original plan for mankind. Our Lord affirms this truth in His discourse with the Pharisees and explains to His disciples what this means: *'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another she commits adultery'* (Mk. 10:11-12).

In our times, perhaps more so than any other time in Christian history, this teaching is challenged and denied. Our Lord's teaching however, is an expression of the restoration of humanity brought about by the coming of Christ Our Lord to earth. The Pharisees posed their question because at the time of Our Lord, Mosaic Law allowed a husband to leave his wife, but a wife could not leave her husband. Our Lord responds by affirming the fundamental equality of man and woman and by extension of all people; and this is reflected in Christian moral codes that hold men and women to the same standards of behaviour. The idea that there should be one moral code that applies equally to both sexes is an innovation of Christian belief. The prohibition against divorce established Christianity as the only religion in the history of the world to call its members to strict monogamy. This teaching protected women who, especially in the ancient world, were typically put at a tremendous economic and social disadvantage in cases of divorce. The same is true today. Divorce hurts all of us ultimately, because *the family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society* (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2207).

As you may know, today, in Rome, Bishops from around the world have gathered with our Holy Father for the *Synod on the Family*. A synod is a Church council convened to discuss a point of doctrine or discipline. This Synod will discuss the many challenges faced by Catholic families in a world where in some countries, like our own, there have been attempts to alter the nature of the family, the definition of the family and the nature and purpose of marriage. How are we to face these challenges in a manner that enables us to remain faithful to Our Lord's teaching? Let us be mindful that saints have been martyred in defence of the Sacrament of Matrimony; most notably the English Saints Thomas More and John Fisher. Our Lord calls all of us, men and women to observe one moral code obligatory on men and women alike. Historically, the Catholic Church has always

fostered marriage as a lasting commitment of unconditional covenantal love protecting the family structure and putting the sexes on an equal footing. Again, if we look to history, we see that Christian morality offered a refreshing perspective to women in the ancient world accustomed to husbands who cheated and left at will. The number of women who converted to Christianity in the early centuries after Christ indicated that women were attracted to this new way of life which acknowledged and fostered the dignity of women. They were among the most zealous converts and defenders of the faith, and throughout the history of the Church, this pattern has held true

Cultures unaffected by Christian belief – the ancient pagan world, the Orient, Islamic countries, do not accord women the same status as countries deeply influenced by Christian ideas about the fundamental equality between men and women, of husband and wife. What is absolutely clear from the Church's teaching and praxis is that both men and women are called to be models of self-sacrificial service and love. Again the Catechism teaches us: *The family should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped, and the poor. There are many families who are at times incapable of providing this help. It devolves then on other persons, other families, and, in a subsidiary way, society to provide for their needs: 'Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world.'* (#2208).

All of us, young and old, married and unmarried, learn this from the Mystery of the Eucharist that Our Lord has left us. ***We must model our lives on the Mystery that we celebrate.*** The Eucharistic Mystery is inextricably linked to the Sacrament of Marriage as it is to authentic Christian life. Both are challenged in our day but the witness and courage of the martyrs help us to remain faithful to God's law and Our Lord's own example of self-sacrificial love and service. Our own individual fidelity to this example is the best that we can do for our young people to whom we bequeath what was once handed on to us. The English Martyr, St John Fisher, who died upholding the sanctity of marriage and the integrity of the Mass, observed: *If anyone should attentively consider the progress and the decline, and the reformations of life which have often occurred in the Church, he will find that neglect or abuse of this Sacrament has been the cause of decline; and, on the other hand, that faithful worship and devout frequentation of this Sacrament have wonderfully contributed to progress and reform.... Whenever the divine mysteries are undevoutly performed, no hope of any good need be entertained* (Quoted in *Resurgent in the Midst of Crisis, Sacred Liturgy, the Traditional Mass, and Renewal in the Church* by Peter Kwasniewski, Angelico Press, 2014). So we resolve in the midst of the challenges presented by the world to live a life of self-sacrificial love and service; modeled on the Sacrifice, the Mystery that is our life; that we may be refreshed, renewed and strengthened by the Sacrament that we reverently receive *so as to be transformed into what we consume* (Prayer After Communion, Twenty-seventh Sunday Per Annum, *The Roman Missal*).