

Homily 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B 7th October 2018

When I reflect on marriage, I always remember our 35th wedding anniversary. The kids had organised a party and as happens on these occasions they asked Kaye to say a few words. I will never forget what she said: Our marriage has been 35 years of tolerance and compromise and I would not swap a minute of it. Personally I liken our marriage to a piece of string joining us together. When we have an argument or disagreement we cut that string. But inevitably we realise we will both have to compromise and move on. When we move on we retie the string, each time we retie the string the knot brings us closer together. Over the last 44 years our string has accumulated many knots, representing many compromises, each one drawing us closer together. Even after some 44 years of practice I still come up with some daft plans when I do Kaye has a somewhat devastating assessment criteria; she simply asks: Where is the us in that?

The 'Us' in marriage, is that mystical union between a couple that is more than a relationship, that mystical union generated out of the love between a couple that

is so powerful it creates a new entity, the marriage. It is beautifully described in the first reading from Genesis. Genesis is not a scientific thesis on the creation, how can it be it, contains two creation stories. That Genesis is, is beautiful Jewish poetry rich in meaning. The reading from Genesis describes how God is searching all creation for a suitable partner for Adam but none can be found. God then takes a rib of Adam and fashions the rib into a partner for Adam. As Eve is created out of Adam, Adam is incomplete without Eve. In marriage two become one, incomplete without the other; like the ocean and a wave; the singer and a song. Fr Geoffrey Plant beautifully illustrates this point when he writes that Biblical text often refer to Eve as Adam's 'helper' which is a poor translation of the Hebrew *ezer* which is better translated as 'a source of blessing'. Marriage is all about 'Us'.

'Us' is a fundamental component of marriage. A marriage in our Catholic tradition is between a man and a woman. It takes a couple to make a marriage and it takes a couple to make a marriage work. When a couple marry a new entity is generated by the love between those two people. That entity is the marriage. The marriage is the visible sign of the inward

grace bestowed on a couple. Now I'm painfully aware that there will be some of you listening to this homily thinking; "That's okay for Deacon George to talk about marriage in glowing terms but..." There will be many but's; my husband was abusive; my wife walked out and left me with the kids; when I was diagnosed with cancer my husband/wife left; I'm gay where does that leave me; etc. etc. There are many but's which is why Pope Francis says in his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia, The Joy of Love*, said; "Let us not forget that the Church's task is often like that of a field hospital." The Holy Father explains; *'Although the Church realizes that any breach of the marriage bond "is against the will of God", she is also "conscious of the frailty of many of her children". Illumined by the gaze of Jesus Christ, "she turns with love to those who participate in her life in an incomplete manner, recognizing that the grace of God works also in their lives by giving them the courage to do good, to care for one another in love and to be of service to the community in which they live and work"*

How does this "field hospital" relate to today's Gospel surely Mark is quite clear "Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate". To

understand Jesus' teaching as related by Mark you have to understand the context. As Fr Geoffrey Plant points out in his commentary on today's Gospel, In First Century Jewish society divorce was quite common and was solely the prerogative of the husband. Basically in marriage as in the rest of society the woman had no rights. Her marriage was arranged unusually as the result of a deal struck between her father and her husband and in some cases his father. She could be divorced at any time simply by her husband drawing up a bill of divorce and giving it to her. Even after she was divorced she was not free to remarry without the permission of her ex-husband. In a society without 'social safety-nets' a divorced woman who was unable to secure a new partner had two possible options; turn to prostitution and become a social outcast or starve to death. The grounds for divorce varied depending on the Rabbi one followed and ranged from sexual misconduct on the part of the woman, to the wife spoiling a dish she was preparing for her husband. One rabbi went as far as to allow a husband to divorce his wife on the grounds he had found a more beautiful partner.

Jesus teaching was challenging the social norms and supporting the powerless. He was saying enough is enough a woman is not a tradable commodity; marriage is not all about the man it's a partnership. Marriage is about union it's about 'us'. No doubt this stance taken by Jesus would have infuriated the Pharisees as it undermined the privileged position males enjoyed in society.

As I have said time and time again Jesus was a disruptive force and the Holy Spirit is a disruptive force. The Holy Spirit is at work in Pope Francis "field hospital" loving those whose lives have been shattered by unimaginable mental and physical brutality. The question I ask myself is do I have the courage to be the presence of Christ in that "field hospital"; do I have the courage of 'us' or will I be like the Pharisees and ignore the plight of the powerless? The choice is mine.