

Readings for October 3, 2021 – 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

## *Accept the Kingdom Like a Child*

*Jesus once again asks us to live our faith with childlike simplicity. He also shows us the need to care for those who are vulnerable, and in need, including women, who in his time could be devastated by divorce and civil policy.*

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**Opening Prayer:** Dear Lord, today I ask for the grace to hear your Word more deeply so that I might run to you as a child, filled with wonder and amazement at your love for me. I thank you for showing us the need for compassion and justice toward those who are vulnerable, and in need. Amen.

### Reading I Gn 2:18-24

The LORD God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him."  
So the LORD God formed out of the ground various wild animals and various birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each of them would be its name.

The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all wild animals; but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man.

So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

The LORD God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man.

When he brought her to the man, the man said:

"This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;

this one shall be called 'woman,' for out of 'her man' this one has been taken."

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh.

### Responsorial Psalm Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6

**R. (cf. 5) May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.**

Blessed are you who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways!

For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork;

blessed shall you be, and favored.

**R. May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.**

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the recesses of your home;

your children like olive plants around your table.

**R. May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.**

Behold, thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD.

The LORD bless you from Zion: may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

**R. May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.**

May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

**R. May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.**

## Reading II Heb 2:9-11

Brothers and sisters: He "for a little while" was made "lower than the angels, " that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering. He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin. Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them "brothers."

## Gospel Mk 10:2-16 or 10:2-12

The Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?" They were testing him. He said to them in reply, "What did Moses command you?" They replied, "Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her." But Jesus told them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. *For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.* So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate." In the house the disciples again questioned Jesus about this. He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.

## *Related Reflections*

It is important to ask why Jesus is making a big deal about divorce. Here the historical context is important. Note that Matthew only speaks of men divorcing women. In Matthew 19, he is responding to a question from the Pharisees, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?"

Where Jesus lived and taught, divorce was only available to men. [Mark, whose gospel was used in Rome made the teaching of Jesus gender neutral because in Rome upper-class wives could divorce their husbands.]

I look upon Jesus' teaching on divorce as the first feminist legislation because a divorced woman was kicked out on the street with no assets or alimony. Her father would not take her back because she was a failure. No man would marry her. She had no education and few marketable skills. She would have to beg on the streets or prostitute herself.

It was not until the 19th Century that divorced women began to get some protection from the civil law. As a result, divorce was clearly a devastating injustice to women for most of human history. Jesus quite rightly condemned it since practically all divorces were done by powerful men to powerless women.

Today we live in a different world. How can we be so certain that Jesus would respond in the same way to divorce today? True, most divorces involve sin, moral failure and great pain. True, in most divorces women get the short end of the stick. Divorce is not something to be shrugged off, but once it has happened and a marriage is dead, can there be a possibility for healing and life in the future?

Pope Francis thinks so. So do I.

*Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese is a senior analyst at Religion News Service*

Today's Gospel features the Pharisees challenging Jesus with a seemingly unsolvable problem. Based on an ambiguous word, leading scholars of the Old Testament law could not agree about the acceptable legal grounds for divorce. Tragically, the ancient world was too often tainted by the treatment of women as if they were mere property, giving near total rights to a man in the case of divorce.

A woman had little legal recourse if her husband no longer wanted her. Jesus' response to their challenge pointed to the original meaning of marriage and towards her protection from the arbitrary whims of her husband. Jesus' response here is representative of many instances in which he challenges injustices and points us in a new direction; a direction we slowly come to embrace.

Looking back over your own life, how has God been patient with your stubbornness?

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### **'With wonder and awe'**

Have you noticed the tendency to get into the habit of listening to someone talk so that you can respond to them? We often do that. We do not, in reality, listen to them but listen so that we can formulate a response. We sometimes interject, respond, speak. We are, subtly and unconsciously, the focal point in the conversation.

Active listening means paying attention to the conversation, the person, by not interrupting. It means taking the time to understand what the person is saying and not feeling we have to respond. It is other-centred.

Too often we let what we think we 'know' prevent us from seeing things as they really are. It seems as if Jesus knew this tendency all too well. He puts a child before his disciples and says that the kingdom of God belongs to children. Children have the remarkable ability to approach the world with wonder and awe. They can see everything for the first time, not prejudiced or partisan but with attention and expectation. We are invited to cultivate a childlike mind by which we see everything for the first time. When we are childlike (not childish), we approach others and the world with wonder and expectation.

To be able to do this, we have to free ourselves from being trapped by experiences of the past. We have to try and arrive at every moment as if we had never been there before. When we cultivate living like this, we reserve judgment. We recognise that each moment is unique and rich with potential. Every encounter or experience becomes one of limitless possibility to learn something new.

Can you approach today, the experiences and encounters, with openness knowing something new is possible? Try listening to someone without thinking about how to respond, just let them speak.

*Fr. Russell Pollitt, S.J (Jesuit Institute of South Africa)*

### **From Pope Francis:**

To enter the Kingdom of Heaven we must make ourselves small like children...The child always asks a thousand questions because he wants to discover the world; and he wonders even at little things, because everything is new to him. To enter into the Kingdom of Heaven we must allow ourselves to be astonished. (*General Audience, Nov. 15, 2017*)

## *Discussion Questions*

Talk a little bit about the first reading, and how it fits with today's Gospel passage.

How have we, as humans, altered God's initial plan for his beloved creation?

Do we sometimes make our faith more complicated than it needs to be? What is Jesus telling us about this? What other ways did he tell us, or show us, how to simply live our faith?

How does Fr. Pollitt's suggestion (above) fit with what you might know about St. Ignatius, who reminded us to always "pay attention" to what God is doing in our lives? How can we do that better?

**Prayer:**

Lord God, Teach me to approach life's experiences and encounters with a childlike wonder and expectation. Free me from anything that prevents me from living each moment as if it contains endless possibility. Amen (from Fr. Pollitt)

## *Focus on Justice*

At the center of the Church's teaching on peace, and at the center of all Catholic social teaching are the transcendence of God and the dignity of the human person. The human person is the clearest reflection of God's presence in the world; all of the Church's work in pursuit of both justice and peace is designed to protect and promote the dignity of every person. For each person not only reflects God, but is the expression of God's creative work and the meaning of Christ's redemptive ministry.

[U.S. Bishops, The Challenge of Peace, 1983: 15](#)

**Also from the Bishops:**

Human persons are willed by God; they are imprinted with God's image. Their dignity does not come from the work they do, but from the persons they are. (St. John Paul II, *On the Hundredth Year [Centesimus annus]*, no. 11)

The basis for all that the Church believes about the moral dimensions of economic life is its vision of the transcendent worth -- the sacredness -- of human beings. The dignity of the human person, realized in community with others, is the criterion against which all aspects of economic life must be measured.

<https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/life-and-dignity-of-the-human-person>

- What do you think the bishops mean by the phrase, "the transcendence of God?"
- What do you think Jesus is saying about the dignity of women and other vulnerable people as he discusses the concept of divorce?

**Suggested Meditation:**

Let us take a few minutes to pray silently, each in our own way, for a true understanding of the human dignity of each person, and for a more peaceful and just world.

Think of a few examples when Jesus showed us how to treat others with dignity, sometimes even breaking with the societal and religious customs of his day.

When does it seem hard to recognize someone as a child of God-- as someone who is made in the image and likeness of God?

When have I dismissed or diminished someone because of that person's culture, race, or maybe their educational or economic status?

I ask for the grace to be more open, more loving, more understanding of the needs and life situations that others around me might be facing.

Share with the group, if you would like, about anything that might have come up for you during this time of prayer.

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### ***Litany of the Spirit***

**Leader:** Let all of us joined together give thanks to our Heavenly Father, creator of all that exists.

**All:** With hearts full of love we give thanks and praise.

**Leader:** Let us acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit among us right now.

**All:** We welcome the Spirit, and ask for an outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially wisdom and understanding.

**Leader:** Loving God, you call us to live the Gospel of peace and justice.

**All:** We will strive to live justly.

**Leader:** Loving God, you call us to be your presence in the world.

**All:** We will strive to love tenderly.

**Leader:** Loving God and gentle Spirit, fill us anew with your gifts, and help our hearts to be open and receptive as you invite us into the fullness of life.

And may we always be aware and alert to the new things the Spirit makes possible, as our world unfolds amid pain and beauty, into the fullness of life to which all are called, participating in the wise and wonderful work of co-creation.

**All:** In faith and hope we are sustained, in grace and dignity reclaimed; in praise, we thank our loving God. Amen.