

October 6, 2024 – Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

“The God of the Living, not of the dead” by Pastor Julio Romero

Gospel: Mark 10:2-16

I would think that by the time the Pharisees asked Jesus the question about divorce, they should have known that they wouldn't get an easy answer from him, and the reason is that they always came to Jesus trying to trap him, trying to test him, trying to get him into trouble. The Pharisees were not the only ones who did that.

Do you remember the Sadducees? The Sadducees, like the Pharisees, were respected and renowned priests at the Temple in Jerusalem. They didn't believe in the Resurrection and one day they asked the Lord:

²⁴ “Teacher, Moses said, ‘if a man dies and leaves behind a wife but no children, then that man's brother must marry the woman. Then their children will be called the children of the brother who died.’ ²⁵ Once, there were seven brothers who lived here. The oldest brother married a woman. Then he died before they had any children. So the second brother married the woman. ²⁶ But then he also died with no children. So a third brother married this woman. And the same thing happened to all the brothers down to the seventh brother. They all died before the woman had any children. ²⁷ After all this, the woman also died. ²⁸ You teach that one day dead people will become alive again. On that day, whose wife will that woman be? She had married all seven of those brothers.”

²⁹ Jesus said to the Sadducees, ‘You are wrong. This is because you do not know the scriptures. And you do not know how powerful God is. ³⁰ One day, God will raise people up after they have died. They will become alive again. But then men and women will not marry. They will not have husbands or wives. Instead, they will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹ It is true that one day dead people will become alive again. You have read in the scriptures about what God said to you: ³² “I am the God of Abraham. I am the God of Isaac. And I am the God of Jacob.” God is not the God of people who are dead. He is the God of people who are alive.’ (Matthew 22:24-32)

This passage illustrates how complex the issue of marriage was in Jesus' time and continues to be today. Today, we would not agree with the practice of a widow marrying seven brothers after each of them died, and so it is with many people today who disagree with the current views on the wide concept of marriage and of divorce.

What you and I know is that marriage and divorce are not all black and white these days. It changed in the past and continues changing today. In the time of our Lord Jesus, the subject of divorce put women at a real disadvantage. The law of Moses that guided the decision on divorce for the Hebrew people had been misused to the point that all that was needed for a man to divorce his wife was a certificate of divorce written by the husband, a couple of witnesses, and then put it in his wife hands and send her out of the house with nothing. That's all that it took which was very unfair.

Imagine how hard it was for a divorced woman in those days. She had two options: find a new husband or return home to her parents. Remember that women were not allowed to own any property and they totally depended on their husbands or family to survive.

We may find Jesus' views on marriage and divorce quite strict in this Gospel that I just read to you, but knowing the predicament of a divorced woman and the risks and vulnerability that a divorce brought upon her, I think that could be the reason why Jesus made the issue of divorce very strict and difficult.

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is the famous phrase known as the Golden Rule. Is this the rule that Jesus had in mind when he talked about a husband divorcing his wife?

Imagine if we do a reversal of roles here. Imagine if a wife wrote a certificate of divorce to her husband just because he spent too much time watching football or playing golf, evicted him from the house and kept all his possessions? What would men think of that? This may sound like an exaggeration, but that's the way it was and how easy it was for a husband to divorce his wife in Jesus' time. Men would divorce their wives for almost anything, leaving them and exposing them to real poverty and misery.

I think what the Lord Jesus is seeking in his teachings about divorce is fairness, equality and compassion in marriage. He is knocking at the hearts of the men of his time and of today as well. The Lord Jesus is helping them, helping us to think twice. If there is something that doesn't feel good, that is hurting or will hurt another person, it needs to change.

Someone said, "We are here on earth to do good to others. What the others are here for, I don't know."

If we all would be on the side that we are here to do good, then we all would know what the others are here for as well.

At the end of Jesus' answer to the Sadducees the Lord Jesus said, "God is not the God of people who are dead, He is the God of people who are alive." What this means is that God cares about every single child of today, every single person who is alive and especially the most vulnerable, those who are mistreated. The day that we will set aside the differences of gender, colour, ethnicity, etc., and all we will care about is the person, that is the day when we will come really close to God.

The manger and the cross represent how close God came to us. He could not have come any closer, and what He is asking of us is nothing compared to the sacrifice He had to make to be close to us. All that God wants is that we are fair to one another, that we all treat each other with respect, and dignity, even in matters of gender, divorce and marriage. God's expectations are the same because living people are people with feelings, emotions and needs. It doesn't matter if they are male or female, it is the same for both and we all need to be concerned about and care for each other. Let's not forget that God is the God of the living and not of the dead. *Amen*