

14. August 2021

**“The Bond of Marriage”  
Part 2**

**Mt 19:3-12**

*'Some Pharisees approached him, and to put him to the test they said, 'Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatever?' He answered, 'Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh? They are no longer two, therefore, but one flesh. So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide.' They said to him, 'Then why did Moses command that a writ of dismissal should be given in cases of divorce?' He said to them, 'It was because you were so hard-hearted, that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but it was not like this from the beginning. Now I say this to you: anyone who divorces his wife - I am not speaking of an illicit marriage - and marries another, is guilty of adultery. 'The disciples said to him, 'If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is advisable not to marry.' But he replied, 'It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted. There are eunuchs born so from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs made so by human agency and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.'*

In yesterday's meditation, we emphasized the uniqueness of marriage, both in its indissolubility and its exclusivity; that is, when the spouses become “one flesh”, an intimate union with another person is excluded as long as one continues to be bound by a valid marriage.

In canon law we are familiar with the process of so-called “nullity of Marriage”. Some people believe that it is a kind of divorce, or at least in practice it is handled as such. But in reality, the nullity of marriage, as long as this possibility is not abused, is not a divorce.

Therefore, in this case, the command of the Lord and of the Church would not be violated. Rather, the Church declares a marriage invalid when it finds that at the time it was contracted certain conditions necessary for its validity were not fulfilled. In this case, then, the marriage never really existed.

We must maintain that, according to Catholic doctrine, remarriage is not possible as long as a valid marriage bond continues to exist.

For pastoral reasons, it is very important to address those people who, for various reasons, failed in their marriage and have entered into a new relationship. *“It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick”* - Jesus tells us (Mt 9:12). However, all the paths that are sought for those affected must have as their goal to consider the objective order as a norm according to which we must all be governed, and not only as a mere orientation or an ideal.

Now, if there are Catholics who find themselves in this disordered situation and long to be united to the Lord and to the Church through Holy Communion, then they should abstain in their second union from those acts which are reserved exclusively for marriage. In case they have children from this second union, the Church permits that, for the sake of the children, they may continue to live together, but as brothers and sisters, without the acts properly conjugal. If one commits oneself to this, one can receive Holy Communion.

The logic here is understandable, for under these conditions the existing marriage bond is not being offended, so that the person concerned can objectively return to the state of grace and correspond to the demands of the Gospel.

There are influential circles in the Church that consider that this regulation is too legalistic, and that some situations should be examined on a case-by-case basis, since it could be that the person affected was not at much fault or practically no fault at all in arriving at an irregular situation such as this. They propose, then, that the accompanying priest examine the case individually and then leave it up to the conscience of those affected to decide whether or not to receive communion. In addition, it is argued that there could be cases in which, due to certain circumstances, the invalidity of the marriage can no longer be ascertained; but the person has the moral certainty that a true marriage bond never existed. Those who support this openness see in it an act of God's mercy and a new way of reaching out to these persons, offering them Holy Communion also as a remedy.

However, all these considerations have in common the fact that they want to offer Holy Communion without the persons in question having dissolved their “second union” or fulfilling the requirement of living in abstinence.

The goal of true pastoral accompaniment, on the other hand, can only consist in helping the persons concerned to find the path that objectively leads to the state of grace. Even if the personal guilt of having arrived at that “irregular situation” is only very slight, the sexual act in the second union wounds the truth of marriage. True mercy must be aware of this, for it has in view not only the suffering of the person in question, but above all its transcendental dimension.

For this reason it cannot omit or relativize the objective requirement of truth. And even if it were the exceptional case that someone has the moral certainty that his or her marriage is invalid and therefore considers that his or her new union is not an obstacle to receiving Holy Communion in an appropriate manner, it is important to keep in mind yet another aspect.

One must not cause a scandal for other faithful by giving the impression that the Church now permits or tolerates something that is permitted neither by Scripture nor by authentic Church doctrine. In protecting marriage, the Church is guarding a great good, as Jesus urges us to do.

She is perhaps the only major religious community that defends the sanctity of marriage against all attempts to weaken it, even though there have been recent deviations in this area. Defending marriage is a great task in the present time, when there are so many disordered and mistaken relationships.

It is a great challenge to fulfill and give witness to the Will of God, without any limits and without retrenchment, in a world increasingly alienated from the faith. Certainly we can all count on God's mercy when we fail in the great goal of living in complete conformity with God's Will. However, we cannot give up on this goal or weaken it; rather, we must sincerely strive to achieve it. This is the testimony that the world needs, and thus we will be corresponding to the Lord's plan.