

16. August 2024

Obedience to the commandments of the Lord (Part I)

At that time, pharisees came up to Jesus and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, '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. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery." The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry." But he said to them, "Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it."

The theme of today's Gospel is a somewhat sensitive and topical one, which is why it is worth spending a little more time on it. For this reason, both today's and tomorrow's meditations will deal with this important theme, even if we cannot deal with it in all its complexity in this context. Tomorrow we will return to this theme without reading the Gospel again.

In view of the current situation in the Church, today's Gospel deals with a question of great importance, which has been the subject of intense pastoral debate and, unfortunately, confusion among the faithful.

The question is this: How should the Church deal with those who have entered into a sacramental marriage which is still in force, but who then separate from their spouse and live in a new union? Or, to get to the heart of the whole current controversy: Could it be possible, under certain circumstances, for the so-called "divorced and remarried",

i.e. those who live in a second union, to have access to Communion, although the invalidity of their marriage bond has not been officially recognised?

Daily meditations are not the place to answer these questions in detail. That is for moral theologians and canon lawyers. There are, however, some basic guidelines to consider that point the way forward on this question.

First, there is the word of the Lord Himself. The Gospel we have read today makes it clear that with the coming of Jesus into the world, God's original plan for the relationship between man and woman was to be re-established. Although God had allowed divorce provisionally through Moses - because of the hardness of man's heart - this was not His original will.

The Lord's argument is crystal clear! In His plan of creation, God had ordained that man should be for woman and woman for man, and that in their union they should become "one flesh". But once man and woman have become one, they cannot at the same time enter into a second union or become "one flesh" with another person, as long as the marriage bond they have entered into remains valid. It is impossible to be "one flesh" with two people at the same time! It is possible to become "one spirit" with many people, but not "one flesh".

This points to the uniqueness of marriage as a unique physical and spiritual union from which new life can be born. Against this background it becomes clear why a homosexual relationship can never be a marriage, but in a way caricatures it, for it is not possible to become "one flesh" with a person of the same sex, nor can new life be generated, nor is such a relationship part of God's will. They are therefore a distortion of God's plan.

This great good of marriage, which for us Catholics is indissoluble, must be protected because it is the natural nucleus of the human family. Its very existence is a testimony to God's love, which must be visibly reflected both in the mutual love of spouses and in the love of parents for their children. It also creates a new community of life....

However, we all know that, especially in our time, marriage and the family are exposed to all kinds of attacks and that, despite the sacramental grace received by the spouses, there can be great difficulties in living together which, at a certain point, can become subjectively unbearable for some people. In this way, this communion of life, which

should be a witness of love, can even turn into the opposite. I am not referring here to the sin of adultery, which is a profound violation of the marriage bond, but to other serious problems and disagreements that could justify the so-called "separation of bed and table".

For our purposes, it is important to remember that in these cases the marriage bond continues to exist even if the spouses live separately. Therefore, neither of them has the right to enter into a new relationship involving sexual intercourse. According to the words of Jesus and the authentic Magisterium of the Church, such a relationship would be adultery. Marriage is only dissolved by the death of one of the spouses!

For some time now, the process of "annulment" has existed in ecclesiastical law. This is not a divorce; it is a matter of establishing that, at the time the marriage was contracted, certain conditions indispensable for its validity were not fulfilled. In such cases, when these deficiencies are clearly recognised, the Church can declare the marriage null and void, which means that there was never a valid marriage bond.

If, then, as the Lord and the Church tell us, remaining faithful to the words of Jesus, the marriage bond can only be dissolved by death or declared null and void by the ecclesiastical tribunal, it is objectively impossible for a Catholic to enter into a new, valid marriage while the previous marriage bond is still in force.

But what possibilities could be offered to those who are objectively in a state of separation from God, but who long to live in union with Him and His Church?

In tomorrow's meditation we will try to address this question....