

Genesis 2:18-24

Psalm 128

Hebrews 2:9-11

Mark 10:2-16

Homilist: Deacon Mike Mocek

October 7, 2018

One Sunday morning a few years back, I was driving on a rural highway in west Texas when the sermon of a very fundamental pastor of a local church came on the radio. I do not normally listen to these broadcasts but there is not much else on the air in that area on Sunday mornings, and I had no CDs or other music sources available to me at the time. So, I decided to listen, thinking that I might at least hear something interesting. And, hear something interesting I did. It did not take long for this preacher to begin railing about the concept of pre-history. He said there was no such thing. Any pre-historic claim was absurd, he added, because the creation of our world is recorded history in the Bible, and before that, there was nothing. Well, I almost ran off the road. I laughed, but it was not at all funny. It was a sad, though not uncommon, misrepresentation of Holy Scripture and an unfounded attack on both history and science. Theologians and Scripture scholars tell us repeatedly that the Bible is not a history textbook, though it is, of course, intended to teach us. Holy Scripture reveals God to us, so we can in turn learn more about who we are and about how we can better live our lives.

Our first reading today is taken from the second of two separate and distinct creation accounts in the Book of Genesis. Both creation accounts teach us valuable lessons about God and about ourselves, but not in a historic context. Mark has Jesus quoting from both creation accounts in today's Gospel when Jesus responds to the devious question of the Pharisees about

divorce. "God made them male and female." is quoted from chapter 1 of Genesis, the first creation account. And, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh." is quoted from chapter 2 of Genesis, the second creation account. Mark also makes it clear that the Pharisees were testing Jesus with their question, and they were trying to set him up for criticism. It was well known that Mosaic law allowed men to divorce their wives, but it did not allow women to divorce their husbands. That discrepancy, however, was not an issue for the Pharisees. The primary point of contention in Jesus' time was the grounds for divorce. Some believed that a divorce should be granted only for infidelity on the part of the wife, while others felt a man should be able to divorce his wife for anything that he found objectionable. Jesus defied the efforts of the Pharisees to draw him into that controversy. Rather than arguing the precepts of law, Jesus cited the creation stories to emphasize that God created men and women as equals and in God's image. And in marriage, the two shall become one – not just one couple or one in spirit, but one flesh. Jesus acknowledged that Moses instituted divorce as a concession to human weakness, but the unequivocal ideal for marriage, as revealed by God from the beginning, is a lifelong relationship of love, fidelity, and mutual support.

As we see throughout the Gospels, the actions and teachings of Jesus in today's Gospel are driven by his intense love and care for the least and the most vulnerable of society. In his time, the least and vulnerable included most women and children. Though created equal and in God's image, women of Jesus' time did not enjoy the fruits of equality with their male counterparts. Women were effectively

treated as property to be handed from father to husband through marriage. And apart from their fathers or husbands, women had few, if any, rights. They could not own property or earn wages, and consequently, could not on their own provide for themselves and their children. The abrupt transition in this Gospel reading from the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees about marriage to his dialogue with the disciples about children lends further emphasis to his concern for the least and vulnerable. The disciples were trying to keep the children away from Jesus so they would not bother him. But Jesus insisted that the children belonged with him as role models for Christian life. He embraced the children, and he blessed them. By his actions and his words in this Gospel, Jesus rejected any form of prejudice for those considered important over those considered insignificant in society. He affirmed the dignity of each person created in the image of God.

If we are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in our world today, then we too must resist letting ourselves get mired in cherry-picking or self-serving legalism in our reading of Holy Scripture. Like Jesus, we must keep our attention focused on what is truly important – love of God, love of neighbor, and care for the least and the most vulnerable of our society. We should allow no one to slip through the cracks. No one should have to suffer neglect or abuse – not women or children, not the mentally ill, not the poor or the homeless, not immigrants, not even criminals. We are all created in the image of God.