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27th Ordinary Sunday - 3 October 2021

Anthony Doran

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3 October 2021

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Anthony Doran

Introduction

We are all familiar with hitting the reset button to restart our devices. Today's Mass invites us to do something similar. Both our First Reading and our Gospel Reading this Sunday take us back to the beginning, to God's Creation, to what God intended for us, from the beginning.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you came that we might learn to live in love. Lord, have mercy.
You teach us to love one another. Christ, have mercy.
You lead us to the kingdom of heaven. Lord, have mercy.

First Reading

Genesis 2:18-24

Today's first reading, taken from the older of the two creation stories in Genesis, highlights the fundamental relational nature of humanity: we are created to be with each other, from the beginning we are oriented to being in communion with other human beings.

Second Reading

Hebrews 2:9-11

Today we begin a seven week of the Letter to the Hebrews. Today's reading reflects on Jesus: while being crowned with glory and splendour, he was also made 'lower than the angels' to bring his brothers and sisters into glory with him.

Gospel Reading

Mark 10:2-16

In today's Gospel Reading, Jesus restates what we have heard in the First Reading: the original purpose God intended in Creation for human beings to flourish. It is restated in opposition to those enemies of Jesus who seek to distort God's plan of creation.

Reflection

The Book of Genesis, from which our First Reading comes today, while being the first book in the Bible, is certainly not the first book of the Bible which was written. The first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, existed in oral form for perhaps a thousand years before they were written down. Stories which were passed on from generation to generation among the people of God. This is even more the case for these early chapters of the Book of Genesis, which deal with the creation of the world. These pages were written by the sages and story-tellers of the People of Israel. They come as the end point of their long meditations on the origins of the universe and the origins of humanity, on life, evil and death. All these great questions which humans have asked themselves through the ages.

The stories of the People of Israel probably reached written form when the Israelites were in Babylon in Exile, about five hundred years before Jesus. Surrounded by Babylonian culture and religion which told stories of the creation of the Babylonian world by fantastic gods and goddesses, the Israelites recorded their reflections using the literary genre of the Creation Story. By reflecting on their experience of God, they sought to interpret how the creation of their world might have come about. In writing the part of the Book of Genesis which we have just heard, they sought to give a framework of meaning to the mystery of man and woman and the deep-seated impulse that attracts man and woman to each other.

Today's First Reading comes from the older of the two creation stories in the Book of Genesis. In this story, the man is created before any other living thing. But so the story goes, God saw that it was not good for the man to be on his own. And so, other living beings were created, and the man was given the task of naming these creatures. Even though God is the creator of the world and all that is in it, he has given stewardship of creation to the man.

But, among all the cattle and all the birds of the heaven and all the wild beasts, there is no suitable companion for the man. Until at last, woman is created. Finally, there is a suitable helper and partner for the man. In the biblical view, man and woman are created equal. To be companions to one another. Human beings are created for community; they are made to belong to one another. We are not made for isolation. We are more authentically human when we are in communion with another person.

The Pharisees who questioned Jesus in today's Gospel Reading knew that the Jewish law of marriage stemmed from this understanding of the human person which their ancestors had. They knew that human persons were created to be in communion with each other. Therefore, marriage was seen as something sacred and permanent. Not to be discarded at the first hurdle.

But the Jewish Law had allowed some exceptions to this teaching that marriage was sacred and indissoluble. But there was by no means agreement on what the exceptions to this law might be. We are told that the Pharisees asked this question to trap Jesus. And so any answer Jesus might give to this question would risk getting him off side with one party or the other.

Jesus avoids their trap. He turns the question back onto his inquisitors, and asks them what Moses had taught them. Not surprisingly, the Pharisees are able to give Jesus the correct answer according to the Law of Moses: that the Law did allow a man to divorce his wife. This view stems from a time when women were considered inferior to men; indeed women were considered to be the property of men, and divorce was seen as a matter of the property rights of the man.

But Jesus, in reply, give the exact interpretation of the Book of Genesis: Man and woman are created equal. They have the same duties towards each other.

In marriage, two become one body. "So then, what God has united, man must not divide."

These words of Jesus could not be clearer. Marriage is sacred and indissoluble.

But, according to the 2016 Census figures, just less than 50% of Catholics in Australia are married. And just over 11% are divorced or separated. So, the reality for many Catholics in Australia is quite different to the lofty ideal with which Jesus presents us. While Christ's teaching about marriage is clear, equally clear is his command to have compassion on all people, regardless of the state in which they might find themselves. In the Kingdom, there is room for all people. Whether they fit the ideal or not. It is not our task to decide who may or may not find a place around God's table. We must always avoid any holier-than-thou attitude by which we think we can judge peoples who might be outside the ideal. This judgement belongs to God alone.

The Gospel today concludes with Jesus' famous statement about the place of children in the Kingdom. Children do have a place at God's table. As do the poor and all the other "little ones" who seek to enter the Kingdom without guile. Without double-dealing and deception. What Jesus praises here is not some silly childishness, but rather the simplicity and the child-like trust which all of us are called to have in God our Father. As we listen to God's Word and are nourished with the body and blood of his Risen Son, with that same simplicity and child-like trust, let us come to the Father and entrust ourselves ever more to his mercy.

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

Since we are made in the image and likeness of God, we come with trusting hearts to present our needs.

Petitions

We pray for Pope Francis and all Church leaders that they lead their communities with faith, hope, and love. May that be evident today as the Plenary Council commences around Australia.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our nation's leaders. May they follow the example of Christ, to serve with wisdom, courage and mercy in all political situations.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all married couples that their strength to love each other as Christ loves his Church may be deepened. May their relationship grow each day and flourish through kindness and forgiveness.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for families separated by divorce. May unconditional love and understanding be a bridge to reconciliation and restoration for all involved.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who have lost family both here and overseas due to the pandemic. Bring them peace and strength through the love of those around them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all of us gathered here. May the daily sufferings that we carry bring us closer to Christ through the cross.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

We offer these prayers in faith and hope through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

GA

A new commandment. Anon. 318
For the beauty of the earth. F. Pierpoint. 427
God, in the planning. J. Bell. 220
Love divine, all loves excelling. C. Wesley. 463
Love is his word. L. Connaughton. 462
One bread, one body. J. Foley SJ. 193
Seed, scattered and sown. D. Feiten. 195
This is my will, my one command. J. Quinn SJ. 465

AOV1

For the beauty of the earth. F. Pierpoint. 123
Like a child rests. C. Walker. 85
One bread, one body. J. Foley SJ. 129

AOV2

Bridegroom and bride. J. Bell. 42

AOV4Kids

May the feet of God walk with you. R. Mann. 67

CWB

For the beauty of the earth. Folliott Sandford Pierpont. 678

CWBII

Sunday by Sunday hymn suggestions
As man and woman we were made. Brian Arthur Wren. 135
For the beauty of the earth. Folliot S. Pierpont. 487
One bread, one body. John Foley SJ. 579

S&S1

One bread, one body. John Foley, S.J. 161

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 127: *May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.*
Psalm 127: Noel Ancell. CWB 428
Psalm 128 (127): Jenny O'Brien. JOBB pg. 96
May the Lord bless us: Tony Alonso LPB pg. 160

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Let the children come (LCC – Children) [Gathering, Gifts]
One body in Christ (TWB esp V4) [Communion]