

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time B

Life is all about relationships. They abound in our lives. We can think of our relationships with our parents, with our siblings, with our friends and acquaintances. It is how we live our lives based on these relationships that we would like to be remembered in our life. How we are as a father, as a mother, as a child, as a friend, as a believer, or as a person. Our readings for today talk about these relationships especially about the marital relationships we have in our lives. This is so because marriage is said to be one of the crowns of our human relationships. It is where human love is shared. It is where human life is given, formed, nurtured and loved. It is where our family begins, strives, and blossoms. Indeed, marriage is a unique relationship and vocation. But alongside this uniqueness of marriage are its complexities and challenges. We have heard today the question of the Pharisees about divorce; a question when we read what's in between the lines can mean broken relationships and families, bad choices and behaviors, personal hurts and pains. I remember a friend of mine telling me in college, "I will never marry. Just look at those broken families and rampant divorces." I thought, "That's a wrong way of looking at things. We should not focus on the negatives but rejoice instead at the positives. There are a lot of couples out there still that have been together throughout these years; they should be our models and examples, our source of motivation and encouragement. In our world today of so many broken promises and relationships, they stand as our light illuminating what is possible by the grace of God in our relationships." And so we should be proud of those who have lived up these ideals of marriage. They give us hope. They give us assurance. They give us light.

But we should also believe in the loving embrace and compassion of God in the case of our shattered ideals. Divorce, broken families or relationships are facts of our world and of our families today. They have touched us all. They have affected all of us. Some of us might have experienced them personally. Some of us might know someone dear to us who is experiencing or have experienced this sad reality of our lives. For them and for you, we reach out and offer our love, support and prayers. You are the children of God that Jesus is telling us about in our Gospel

today. Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, do not prevent them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

This is rightly so because when we were children, most of us if not all of us, always go back to our parents every time we are hurt, wounded and threatened. It is in their company and embrace that we feel safe, we feel better and we feel cared for. This is true to all of us especially to those who have experienced pain and frustrations in their lives. We always go back to Jesus to feel his love and care for us every time we are down and afflicted. We come to the Church to experience Jesus' compassion and understanding in these situations. Yes, it is in Jesus that we can feel loved and cared for. It is in him that we can find belonging and acceptance. To our brothers and sisters who have been hurt by the pain of divorce and separation; to our brothers and sisters who are experiencing problems in their married life, Jesus still embraces you, Jesus still blesses you and Jesus still loves you.

I have the honor last week to celebrate two weddings here in our parish. I always feel inspired and encouraged every time I celebrate the sacrament of matrimony because it greatly shows our faith and commitment in relationship and covenant – "I give myself to you – you give yourself to me – not a contract – I am yours; you are mine. Forever." In my homily to them, I shared that by being married, they usually receive three rings, the engagement ring, the wedding ring and the last is the suffering ring. Most of you who are married here could testify on this reality, right? Marriage is not always a pleasing and constantly fulfilling life. It's not a happily ever after love story. The spouses have to continue to work on their relationship for each other. They will be tested with the rigors of married and family life. But they have to remember that love is most proven in times of trial. It is in times of suffering and tension, that love is most pure. So I told them to "take into their hearts the vows they are to make to each other that day: I will be faithful to you... for richer and poorer, for better or worse...." My dear brothers and sisters, may the promise of love that couples make for each other in marriage inspire us and strengthen us as we promise as well to take care of our relationships in life.

I once had this conversation with an elderly couple. I have asked them, "How many years have you been married together?" "We have been married for 56 years."

“56 years?” “Yes,” the wife answered, “We have been together for 56 challenging yet fulfilling years.” “What have made you stay together for the last 56 years?” I asked. They looked at each other, hold each other’s hand and said, “we just hold on to each other.” My dear brothers and sisters, just as this couple holds on to each other to make their marriage lasts for 56 years, let us also hold on to each other in facing the challenges of our lives and relationships. As we continue to live by the ideals of marriage as God intended it to be, let us help each other in making our marriages survive and in the case or in the tragedy of divorce, let us still hold on to each in finding healing and renewal in the lives of the people involved. May God embrace us, bless us and place his hands on us in this endeavor. Amen.