

From the Beginning It Was Not So

Daily Gospel / Liturgical Cycle B

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Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Matthew 19:3-12.

Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and tested him, saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?" He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 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. Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate." They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss her?" He said to them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery." His disciples said to him, "If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." He answered, "Not all can accept this word, but only those to whom that is granted. Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it."

Introductory Prayer:

Lord God, I believe in your presence here with me as I begin this moment of prayer. I hope in you. I know that you will always take care of me. I want this time with you to be a sign of my love for you. I seek only to please you, without desiring any spiritual consolation for myself.

Petition:

Lord God, fill me with your grace so I can meet your lofty expectations.

1. Hardness of Their Hearts:

The Pharisees heard Jesus' teaching against divorce at the Sermon on the Mount, a teaching which contradicted the practice of the Jews. And so they sought to trap him in this instance into putting his teaching in opposition to Moses. They were hoping to discredit him. But Jesus knew their twisted intentions and grounded his teaching on God's original plan for man and woman. He knows that they were looking to get around the will of God and carve exceptions. Jesus felt no need to pander to the crowd or offer an easier way out when challenged. His focus was on what God intended. Even today he challenges everyone to respond.

2. A New Law:

Jesus' teaching seems so counter-cultural, no less today than in his own time. How can he be so bold and ask for so much, since we still labor under the same sin, imperfection and hardness of heart as the people of Moses' time and his time? The key is that Jesus does not simply add new laws; he brings the grace to be able to live as God intended "from the beginning," that is, before sin entered the world. Christ can ask more of us because he himself brings the grace for us to live our lives before God in a new way. By grace we are made "new men (and women) in Christ" and transformed into children of God who are empowered to live in holiness and the full truth.

3. Never Give Up:

The disciples seem to be discouraged at first, because the new teaching of Jesus is difficult to live: "then it is better not to marry." They are seeing things through their own narrow experience and through the lens of popular opinion. Yet they must make the transforming encounter with the grace of Christ. We, too, need to believe in that grace and to communicate it to others, since it enables us to love others "as he loved us." It is what brings the vitality and freshness to our Christian lives, and makes us able to offer something new and hopeful to the world around us.

Conversation with Christ:

Jesus, give me the faith and confidence to believe with all my heart that your grace is enough for me. Teach me to believe that your commands are always supported by your grace and that I can live as a new man in you.

Resolution:

I will ask for an unbreakable hope in the power of God's grace acting in me.