

## Trinity XIX – Ordinary Sunday Year B

As many of you know, myself and Shanalee are preparing to get married in December here at All Saints, and while organising all the practical aspects of the wedding, we are in the middle of doing a Catholic Marriage Preparation Course Online, called SMART LOVING. Based on Biblical and Christian understanding of the Sacrament of marriage, psychological relational insights, and the complementarity and the differences between men and women, the course takes you through 10 lessons, helping the couples to reflect on topics such as building and restoring unity, communication, growing in self-awareness, what we bring from our families of origin, and loving the other person according to his or her needs.

I have always asked the engaged couples that I prepared for marriage to do this course and they have given me good feedback, even though it's an extensive time consuming course. I am practising what I have been preaching, as I am doing the course myself, and both myself and Shanalee are finding it very helpful to grow in our relationship. So I recommend this course for any couple preparing to get married, and invite you to recommend it to engaged couples you know. Also, Smart Loving has courses for married couples to enhance their marriages, in fact, any couple could improve their relationship by investing in this way, by doing a course on relationships.

I have often wondered about the lack of formation and preparation that go into the relationship of engaged couples. Mostly, engaged couples are worried about getting the practical things that need to be organised, but very little time and energy is spent on the actual relationship itself. By contrast, if someone wants to be ordained a priest there are years of study, spiritual preparation, and pastoral formation; but if a couple wants to get married there is next to nothing that is offered them by the Church. This lack of formation and preparation also contribute to marriages breaking down in our society, as couples enter into marriages with very limited understanding of what they are walking into, and seeing the failure of so many marriages, many have given up on the idea and the ideal altogether.

Today's readings remind us of the foundations of Christian understanding of marriage. The reading from Chapter 2 of Genesis has traditionally been one of the most popular readings at weddings. Without prejudice to single people and celibates, the divine plan for marriage is set forth with the words ***"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."*** which can also be understood as ***"It is not good that the woman should be alone; I will make her a helper fit for her"***. What is stressed here is the complementarity of masculinity and femininity, not so much the lack of equality between men and women. The man needs a helper fit for him and the woman a helper fit for her. *Men and women are created in the image of God with equal dignity and value, as it says in Genesis*

*1:27 so clearly, God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”*

We had picked this Genesis reading for the last wedding I officiated here a couple of weeks ago, but the person who was asked to read it refused to read the passage as it is “Old Fashioned”. This is due to the misunderstanding of what is communicated here, and the ill treatment of women over the centuries in various cultures including the Judeo-Christian culture.

With the popularisation of gender ideology in our modern western culture we are forgetting the complementarity of men and women, or worse the radical left is attempting to get rid of gender altogether! **The Biblical Truth is that Men and Women are equal but not the same; men are not women and women are not men.** Generally speaking, the physical, psychological and emotional make-up of men and women are different. We are differently wired. Anyone who has been in a relationship can testify to this; a man and a woman would look at a particular issue or a problem differently. This is the cause for a lot of disagreements, if couples are not aware of this fundamental difference. There need to be humility, grace, openness to listen and value each other’s differing views and gifts to be successful and grow in a relationship.

The Genesis text displays a remarkable sense of the companionship, friendship and mutual recognition in love that should

surround sexual union. The love expressed in the union of two in one flesh should simply be the most intimate physical expression of a commitment in companionship and intimacy, embracing the totality of life.

This original vision of unity and completion is what Jesus calls on in today's Gospel. Some Pharisees ask Jesus if it is against the Law for a man to divorce his wife. When Jesus asks them what Moses commanded, they reply that Moses permitted it. In his answer to the pharisees Jesus does not question the validity of the Law of Moses, but claims that it was a concession to human sinfulness – namely, hardness of heart.

We could understand all failed marriages/relationships in this light. Relationships do break down due to the hardness of heart of one or both partners. People do make mistakes, misunderstandings do happen and hurt appear on the agenda. At times spouses do become victims and oppressors. Endless silences do happen, hearts are broken and the ideal of marriage does collapse in our human sinfulness. At times separation is the best option for the well-being of one or both partners. Ultimately marriage is a very high ideal. God will have compassion for those who have experienced the trauma of distress, experienced marriage break-up and the Church does make provision for human failure and inadequacy, even though the help may be slow in coming. At times, spouses experience the heartbreak of marriage failure, through no fault of their own; Therefore, judgements on marriage failure only belong to God and not to us.

Nevertheless, the Church must submit to the vision and ideal of God and of Jesus, and that vision or the ideal remains the norm. It is important to have a common vision for couples to endeavour to aim for. Because we believe that marriage is a sacrament, we refuse to see it as a casual experiment for adventurous people. In recalling Genesis and the foundation of human marriage, Jesus invites all of us to catch up with God's original vision. Jesus' restoration of lifelong fidelity in marriage reclaims the original design of God expressed in the creation story of Genesis. As we know when we have good marriages the human family benefits.

The Kingdom of God, the onset of which is the background to all Jesus' teaching, seeks to reclaim this original design of the Creator, or better, to bring it to realisation for the first time. The community of disciples, as the "beachhead" of the Kingdom in the world, are called to live out and bear witness to this original ideal. So let us give thanks to God for Marriage and family life today, and pray for many young people to be courageous in answering the vocation to Christian marriage.