

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

27th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Genesis 2.7, 15, 18-24)

God gives Man a Partner

The whole of these stories at the beginning of Genesis are intended to explain how God designed things to be. They are, of course, not meant to be historical, but their teaching is of the highest importance, as showing how things were meant to be. By giving the animals their names, the man is taking part in their creation. Made in the image of God, the man's task is to promote God's work and foster creation and foster life, just as God himself does. The creation of human beings is the climax of creation, which means that human beings have a responsibility towards the rest of creation. The warm ideal relationship between God and the man before the Fall is particularly touching. God's care for the man, putting him to sleep before the surgical operation and sewing up the wound himself is delightful. So is God's careful moulding of the woman and the presentation of his handiwork to the man. It is important to see that there is no unevenness between the sexes; each is personally moulded by God. Their welcome for one another is the author's pictorial way of showing that the bonding between them in marriage is a divine institution.

Question:

Is the equality of the sexes sufficiently valued in Christianity?

Second reading:

(Hebrews 2.9-11)

The Leader to Salvation

The Letter to the Hebrews is going to be read for the next seven Sundays right up until Advent. Its author is completely unknown, but it was clearly written for Hebrew priests, who had become Christians and were missing the traditional rites of their people. It assumes knowledge of the Jewish ritual, and with many allusions to scripture, it circles round two themes. First, it shows that the Jewish sacrificial rituals were a pale shadow of which the reality and fulfilment comes in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. Second, it points out that the People of God are still on pilgrimage. God's promise that they would reach a place of rest was not fulfilled by their arrival in the Holy Land; it will be fulfilled only in heaven. In today's reading we glimpse part of the first theme. Jesus humbled himself to become man, only a little less than the angels (the author is alluding to Psalm 8), in order to become perfect through his suffering. He had to become fully human so that by being made perfect he might lead all his brothers (and sisters) to the same perfection.

Question:

*How did Jesus learn by suffering?
How do we?*

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Gospel:

(Mark 10.2-16)

Two become One Flesh

The Pharisees are putting a trick question to Jesus, as is clear in Matthew's fuller account. They knew the Law, which permitted divorce and they will quote this Law to Jesus. The Law allowed divorce for 'indecency' but teachers were divided about what this meant: did it mean adultery or a lesser fault? So their real question is what Jesus considers grounds for divorce. As so frequently in his discussions with the legal experts, Jesus goes beyond the question: God made man and woman such that they should bond together permanently and become one thinking, living being. The one 'body', or one 'flesh', really means one entity, not a hunk of meat but a single, vibrant personality. God's intention was not that they should be separable again. So Jesus does not answer the question about grounds for divorce at all. It is striking that here - and on other occasions - Jesus' authority is such that he feels able to alter the sacred Law of Moses. For the Jews, the Law of Moses was God's own gift, sacred and unalterable by any human authority. By altering it, by annulling the permission for divorce under certain circumstances, Jesus is implicitly claiming divine authority.

Question:

Why has divorce become so frequent? Is there anything Christians can do?
