



# Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time | October 7, 2018

## Jesus Valued Marriage Highly

By Mary Katharine Deeley

**M**y mother was convinced that none of her children would get married. We were older when we were called to that vocation but, one by one, we did marry. I'm happy to say that my husband and I continue to share this vocation three decades later, and we give our thanks to God. My sister was not as fortunate. After years of abuse, she divorced her husband. She didn't make that decision lightly. She went into counseling, prayed, and talked. She considered her children, her husband, and herself. And she read and reread

today's Gospel from Mark. In the end, safety for herself and her children was a major concern.

Jesus railed against the ease of divorce. A man simply had to hand his wife a piece of paper, and he could do so for any reason, including infertility and her failure to please him. But Jesus advances the woman's cause, refusing to allow her to be treated like a piece of property or disposed of at whim. He saw marriage as a sign of God's covenantal love and lifelong fidelity, and exalts it as a sacrament. When both spouses commit themselves to each other and to their vocation, this grace is made manifest, and their bond is strengthened. But sin and human brokenness can interfere with God's plan, leaving separation or even divorce as the only options.

In the longer form of this reading, the people brought their children to Jesus and he blessed them. Maybe we can do the same for those affected by abuse or divorce, so they, at long last, also can be healed. +

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## A Word from Pope Francis

[Marriage] is not merely a ceremony in a church, with flowers, a dress, photographs. Christian marriage is a sacrament that takes place in the Church, and which also makes the Church, by giving rise to a new family community....The love between spouses is an image of the love between Christ and his Church.

—General audience, May 6, 2015



## Sunday Readings

### Genesis 2:18–24

The man said: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."

### Hebrews 2:9–11

He... "for a little while" was made "lower than the angels," that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

### Mark 10:2–16 or Mark 10:2–12

[Jesus said,] "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female....So they are no longer two but one flesh."

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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- Do I offer support, rather than judgment, to those who have experienced abuse or divorce?
- Do I celebrate all the good things my spouse or loved ones offer me? Do I thank them?



# Living in Gratitude

By Kathy Coffey

*You shall not covet your neighbor's wife (Exodus 20:17).*

In Stephen Sondheim's riff on fairy tales, *Into the Woods*, two brothers sing a duet called "Agony." In Act One, they spill forth their unfulfilled longings—one brother for Cinderella, the other for Rapunzel.

The former has searched all night for the elusive maiden who fled his dance at midnight. The latter is intrigued by the unattainable woman confined to a tower. In folktale style, the obstacles are resolved, the slipper fits, the golden hair provides access to the tower. Both men marry their beloved.

By Act Two, reality sneaks in. The novelty wears off, and the brothers once again sing "Agony." This time, they pour out their desire for a maiden with creamy skin and black hair who sleeps in a glass coffin guarded by a stern dwarf. Snow White, because she is unattainable, becomes the object of their affections.

The shift not only creates amusing comedy, it also points to a stubborn trait of human nature: We want what we can't have. Both the Ninth and Tenth Commandments address this quirk.

These two commandments may puzzle us today. Wasn't it the itch for something more that settled our frontiers, built the transcontinental railroad, discovered penicillin, and designed the computer? Don't our longings for finer homes, education, and health care provide a better world for the next generation? And for those aware of gender roles,

isn't a prohibition against coveting the neighbor's wife an archaic attempt to protect male property rights?

## Rooted in Judaism

These commandments make more sense in the context of ancient Jewish culture. When the tablets were given to Moses, the people were wandering, vulnerable, without land. How would they maintain their identity? Surrounded by larger, more powerful states, the last thing the Hebrews needed was internal division. Lust and greed would create fissures in a community that needed to stay united to survive.

Commentators have pointed out a unique feature in this community: the ability to be self-critical. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophets warn the people that unchecked desire takes a terrible toll on the poor. While the sacred texts of other cultures glorify kings and priests, the Old Testament criticizes both government and church leaders. In the same vein, the commandment encourages individuals to examine their own wants, refuting those that are inappropriate.

This stance is helpful because it encourages appreciating the family we have rather than restlessly seeking someone better. Coffee on the porch with the spouse may in the long run satisfy more than unrealized longings for Antonio Banderas or Reese Witherspoon. The balding guy who forgives his wife's

imperfections may act from a long history and a deep kindness. The familiar wife has developed a tolerance for hubby's oddities.

## Admiring the Virtues

No matter what we lack, we can choose to focus on what we have. Though I may have a broken arm, the rest of me functions fine. In the context of the Ninth Commandment, we may not have the perfect spouse. But instead of focusing on flaws, we can admire the virtues.

This doesn't rule out having conversations about genuine failings, working at honest communication, or trying to improve. But most people change for the better only in a positive atmosphere.

In some ways, Christians today are as vulnerable as that small group of Jews that coalesced around their commandments. The larger, more powerful culture surrounding us sneers at our values. We, like the ancient Hebrews, find strength when we're united in gratitude—not comparing ourselves to others or endlessly wishing for someone better. +



Lord, I am grateful for childlike innocence. Help me to be more aware of and responsive to the needs of little children.

*From Grateful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney*

## WEEKDAY READINGS

October 8-13

Monday, Weekday:  
Gal 1:6-12 / Lk 10:25-37  
Tuesday, Weekday:  
Gal 1:13-24 / Lk 10:38-42  
Wednesday, Weekday:  
Gal 2:1-2, 7-14 / Lk 11:1-4

Thursday, Weekday:  
Gal 3:1-5 / Lk 11:5-13  
Friday, Weekday:  
Gal 3:7-14 / Lk 11:15-26  
Saturday, Weekday:  
Gal 3:22-29 / Lk 11:27-28