

Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

'From the beginning, it was not so.'

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Interesting, isn't it, that the Pharisees would test Our Lord over the correct teaching concerning marriage.

'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?'

He answered, 'What did Moses command you?'

The Pharisees go on to tell the Lord that one is indeed allowed to divorce one's wife with the simple writing of a writ of divorce. It is not beyond reason to imagine that the Pharisees used this opportunity to quote the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, and so prove their authority to teach, as followers of the greatest of the prophets, over and against this Jesus, who authorizes Himself only with the ill-defined license of 'His Father.'

It is no light thing to invoke the prestige of Moses when speaking of marriage, since it was Moses himself who penned the book of Genesis, wherein the sacrament of marriage is first instituted. Let him who reveals its origin also reveal its meaning.

Yet Christ does not defend His words as His own, at least, not yet. Rather, He quotes Moses against Moses.

'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, "God made them male and female." "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.'

It is indeed because of the hardness of our hearts that, being given the gift of true and permanent union with another instantiation of humanity, that is, a woman, the first impulse of these religious sages is to ask how such a union might be abolished and humanity be again divided.

There is nothing particularly new about a so-called 'no-fault divorce,' not to mention Hollywood's favorite innovation, the pre-nuptial agreement.

It is most natural that sinful man would meditate upon how he might be freed from the old ball-and-chain, and painlessly so, for to demand complete freedom from duty for himself, he emancipates himself from all obligations of love, that which is the true mystical symbol of the unity of creation. In breaking such unity, man becomes alone, and to be so alone, man can be, or so he thinks, free.

Interesting, isn't it, and perhaps to us Americans, even hateful, that the first charge given to man by the Almighty is one of servitude, not liberation. God speaks in the Garden, *'it is not good for man to be alone.'* And now the Pharisees, and all after them, have made their existential cry the common whining of the adolescent: 'leave me alone.'

We long after the freedom of being left alone, free from all duty, and so it is unsurprising that the world is overflowing with loneliness, unfettered from all love.

Yet from the beginning, it was not so that man should be alone. Rather, he was to live a life of service, caught up in the love of God, and enslaved to the love of neighbor, *'for such is the sum of the Law and Prophets.'*

Adam is to choose for himself a companion, and yet he finds none in all the world, save the woman, born from his heart, drawn from his side, and made in his image; His love rendered to God alone, and hers to God in him.

Because of this, the devil is furious, him who, in every beauty the Lord could offer, deceives himself into pride. The Fathers of the Church understood Satan's first sin not to be so much disobedience to God, but disobedience of man, for man chose another frail human to be his everlasting friend, and so rejected even an angel, the most wonderful of angels, preferring the weakness of flesh.

Yet we would be wrong to believe that Adam simply rejected the majesty of

Lucifer in favor of the wiles of a woman. To put it simply, Adam did not dishonor the devil, he just did not desire, as one might say in a gentrified land, to 'marry down.'

For indeed, it would have been marrying down for Adam to be bound to a mere angel. For though the angels may be pure, undying, unimaginably powerful, and wise unto all heavenly things, yet they are still the servants, not the equal, of men, and so, Adam has no choice but to marry an equal, a woman and a mother, and not the unalloyed glory of the heavenly beings. Adam respects his own status, forged in the mind of the Lord.

For it was not the angels who were once in eternity made in the image of God, but the *weaker vessel*, summoned from the dust. It was not the Seraphim who were given life not simply by the speaking of the word, but from the very kiss of the Almighty.

Neither was it given to the angels to rule over men, but men over the angels, as a single part of the creation once for all subjected to the Lordship of the children of Adam.

So it is that the angels are made to protect mankind from sin and evil in service, not man's duty to bow down before the heavenly army, even as the angels sing songs of glory at the promise of the redemption of man, but beg man not to worship them at their appearing.

It is easy to believe that the angel does not want the praise of man's praise because man's praise is meant for God alone. It is much harder to believe that they deny man's praise because it is their praise that belongs to man, as his attendant and royal guard.

For the Son did not become man only to open his path to heaven, but that in reconciling man to the Father, in man, all creation, both visible and invisible, might find its fulfillment in this union between the likeness of God in man, and the image of man in that which is made.

For man was created to put all the world in subjection to himself, and so in the incarnation, Christ completes the mission of God in *overcoming the world*, and making *all nations his footstool*.

God becomes man, and Jesus is born of the ever blessed virgin Mary, and the angel hosts lift up their voices in praise of God and man, for in the flesh of man being married to the uncreated nature of the Lord, now all the universe may be married again to God through the deified man.

'For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.'

But to man who for a little while was made lower than the angels, that everything may be put under his subjection.

For the first sin was not only a rejection of God's word, but disobedience to His will, His will that *man have dominion over the world, and fulfill it*. In eating of the tree, man wrote his writ of divorce to both God and all created things. Now in Christ, God and man are reconciled, even as the uncreated and the created are wed together, as well as every opposed thing, for we *speak of the mystery of the Church*.

The mystery of this love, and the exaltation of this duty, Adam and the Pharisees, with all of our father's rejected, that they might be left alone. So now the Lord Jesus descended to earth, *and even beneath the earth, that in ascending to my Father and your Father, he might present deified man-king, corrupted nature, and loathsome hell as a tribute to our Father who art in heaven*.

From the beginning, this has not been so. Yet in Christ, it has come to pass that:

*you have crowned him with glory and honor,
putting everything in subjection under his feet."*

For this God deemed necessary. How could he not? It is not because of the hardness of our hearts, but the loving kindness of His that He look upon this world, upon this image, upon you and me, who are but ash and dust; that He takes us into His palm, and in all compassion sighs this eternal conviction, a sweet word, even to a deaf ear, and a kind word to lost soul. Even now, you hear its echo in the scrawl of Moses, you see its completion in the eyes of Christ, even as He bears the child in His arms:

'It is not good for man to be alone.'

'Behold, I and the children God has given me.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Genesis 2:18-25; Hebrews 2:1-13; Mark 10:2-16.