

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Aug 12th 2016

I thank God for my parents who are now retired and live in Bangalore, India. They enjoy the simple pleasures of life — coffee, friends, walks, nature, and their prayer life. Little grandchildren, who have to try out grandpa's glasses and grandma's shoes, keep them young at heart. Fifty-two years of married life have not been a bed of roses, and yet they are grateful, knowing that God has been with them in good times and otherwise. They have fond memories of bringing up seven children — cleaning their bottoms, wiping their noses, losing (and finding) their kids in crowds, and paying their school fees. There were tough times, and they stood by each other.

Jesus, in today's gospel, tells us that marriage is from God. From the beginning, the Creator made them male and female. Husband and wife leave their parents and become one flesh, a human relationship blessed by God. The U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Marriage (2009) explains that marriage is a blessing not only to the couple but also to their families and to society. Through marriage, they are co-creators of human life. "Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate." The New Interpreter's Bible commentary explains the importance of Jesus' pronouncement: (1) it is the first decisive statement against polygamy in Jewish tradition; (2) the husband is made responsible — by divorcing his wife and marrying another, he commits adultery; and (3) women are protected from their husbands' power to divorce at will.

Matthew adds an exception clause ("unless the marriage is unlawful") to Jesus' prohibition of divorce. He points to God's will rather than to a legalistic code. Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation on love in the family, *Amoris Laetitia*, is a timely reminder of God's mercy and love. It helps us to understand the challenges that married couples face and how their marriages can break down for various reasons. It may be good for us to remember this before we put on our virtual juridical robes and pontificate against those who have separated or divorced.

A quick prayer adapted from Amoris Laetitia #246:

Lord, today you invite us to an important pastoral task: as we pray for all married couples, let us not abandon those who have separated or entered new unions. Help us support them in their efforts to bring up their children. Amen.

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