

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners,

Not long ago I was in a woman's office and noticed a picture she had of her family. What struck me about the picture was that it showed the woman, her children and her husband. Only you couldn't see the husband's face because she had taped paper over it. I figured I knew what this meant and in the course of our conversation she mentioned that she was divorced. How sad it must be for her to look at the picture, I thought. Whatever had gone wrong in their marriage she felt so bad about it she couldn't even bear to see her husband's face. *And some people think celibacy is rough!*

In our Gospel reading last Sunday, which is printed below, we heard our Lord's teaching on the subject of divorce and remarriage. *Mark 10:2-12 and he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again; and again, as his custom was, he taught them. And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away." But Jesus said to them, "For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined 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 put asunder." And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."*

Jesus is as clear as He can be that marriage is between one man and one woman who have been called together by God and that their union is for life. At the same time we know that some couples are never so united as to become the "one flesh" that Jesus speaks about. The plain truth is that sometimes marriages are doomed from the start. With the best intentions couples can enter into marriages without a chance of truly becoming one in heart, mind & body which is what a sacramental marriage is meant to be. For a variety of reasons, couples can lack what it takes to have a sacramental marriage and the whole thing falls apart.

To use an example, a marriage is like building a house from the bottom up. Unless the foundation is sound the house will eventually collapse and sometimes cracks in the foundation are not seen until many years later. This is why the Church issues decrees of annulment. In issuing an annulment the Church is saying that a couple attempted to truly become one, to have a sacramental marriage, to build a home of love together. But the foundation wasn't sound and so they did not succeed. Therefore, even though they had a marriage contract, the sacrament itself didn't take.

I know that there are many Catholics who have experienced this. Some have sought decrees of annulment which they have received after the Church court looked into their cases. However, there are many other divorced Catholics who could probably obtain an annulment but haven't sought one. If this is you, or if you know someone in this situation, please let me know. I would like to provide you, or your friends information on the annulment process. You can do this by filling out the form on this page and mailing it to me at the rectory. or putting it in the collection basket. Please be sure to indicate whether you are seeking the information for yourself or you want it sent, anonymously to someone else.

Many Catholics are confused about whether they can still come to Holy Communion if they are divorced. If a person is simply divorced, they can still come to Communion. However, if they were married in the Catholic Church divorced and then married another person outside the Church they cannot come to Communion unless they obtain a decree of annulment of their first marriage. The exception to this would be if in the second marriage the couple is not having sexual relations either by choice or for medical reasons. A person in this situation could come back to Holy Communion after going to Confession.

Catholics in a first marriage that was not officially blessed by the Catholic Church need to have their marriages validated in the Catholic Church before coming to Holy Communion. Having a marriage blessed by the Church is really pretty simple again, as long as neither party had been previously married.

Finally, unmarried couples who are having relations (fornication), whether they are engaged or not, should stop until they are married. They also should not come to Communion if they are engaging in relations before marriage. To do so is to add the sin of sacrilege to the sin of fornication.

While the practice of fornication is promoted by our culture and has become common, our Lord teaches that it is a grave sin and should someone die in this state they are risking their salvation.

While following Jesus' teachings on marriage and sexuality is a challenge, it is certainly not impossible. Especially since

He gives us all the graces we need to do so. And, in spite of what our culture says, whether we are young or old, you won't actually die from not having sex. Indeed it is possible to have a full and rewarding life without being sexually active.

If you have any questions about these matters for yourself or others, please ask.

With my prayers,

Fr. Conley