

PASTORAL SECTION

HOMILETICS

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (Oct. 4)
Mk 10, 2-16 (or shorter: 10, 2-12)

For Mature Persons Only

A marriage counsellor I am not. A married man I have never been. Yet I dare to speak about love, marriage and divorce — not necessarily in that order. My authority is neither a diploma nor experience, but something higher: nothing less than the Word of God, the Bible.

“What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.” The commandment of God is explicit, categorical. There is no way of escaping from the fact that this is God’s will. We know, of course, that many people break this commandment. Even in a strong-hold of conservatism like Italy, a law has been passed allowing divorce. But the law of God cannot be abolished by the majority vote of men.

One may, however, ask: is not the law against divorce cruel to those who find out after marriage that they cannot live in harmony? Men and women, being children of the first couple who made the most grievous mistake that plunged us all into a problematic world, are liable to make mistakes. Should they continue maintaining the mistake after they have recognized it for what it is?

Let me answer the difficulty by pointing out that the irremediable incompatibility of married people is not the rule but the exception. In these exceptional cases the law of the indissolubility of marriage becomes

a challenge, a call to heroism. If our country has the right to demand heroic acts from us in times of war, should we deny to God the right to demand heroic acts in exceptional cases when married couples truly find it impossible to maintain their married life? Married people who separate without hope of remarriage will certainly find themselves in a very difficult situation. But with the help of God's grace, they can remake their lives.

The heart of the problem, however, is not in the exceptional cases. Divorce, in most cases, is taken as the easy way out of difficult situations that can, in fact, be remedied by a sincere effort to understand another person's moods and psychological needs, by a little give and take, or by that kind of change in one's habits or attitudes that is normal in personal growth. To favor divorce is to deprive marriage of the function of helping married people grow as persons.

Think of the people who ask for a divorce and they remarry. Do they succeed in their second marriage? No. Not, unless they have grown as persons; not unless they have changed for the better. And if they are capable of such a change in their second marriage, they could have made a success of their first marriage had they really tried — had they been forced by the conviction that marriage is indissoluble. If they are people who really can't change to achieve maturity, then their second marriage will also end up in divorce, and so on down the line. Marriage is for mature persons.

The indissolubility of marriage must be considered not merely as a prohibition against breaking up. It is rather an invitation to continually build up unity in marriage. If married couples only remember constantly that it is God, who is Love, who has brought them together and that it is God who will help them in the daily give and take of married life guide them in harmonious personal growth, then the problem of divorce would never crop up.