

# Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

## Year B



**FIRST READING**  
Genesis 2:18-24

**PSALM**  
Psalm 128:1-6

**SECOND READING**  
Hebrews 2:9-11

**GOSPEL**  
Mark 10:2-16 or Mark 10:2-12

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### PRAYER

#### Psalm 128:1-6

Happy is everyone who fears the LORD,  
who walks in his ways.  
You shall eat  
the fruit of the labor of your hands;  
you shall be happy,  
and it shall go well with you.  
Your wife will be like a fruitful vine  
within your house;  
your children will be like olive shoots  
around your table.  
Thus shall the man be blessed  
who fears the Lord.  
The LORD bless you from Zion.  
May you see  
the prosperity of Jerusalem  
all the days of your life.  
May you see your children's children.  
Peace be upon Israel!

### READING THE WORD

#### First Reading

##### Genesis 2:18-24

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to

see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said,  
"This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
this one shall be called Woman,  
for out of Man this one was taken."  
Therefore a man leaves his father  
and his mother and clings to his  
wife, and they become one flesh.

#### Second Reading

##### Hebrews 2:9-11

We see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory,

should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

#### Gospel

##### Mark 10:2-16 or Mark 10:2-12

Some Pharisees came, and to test Jesus they 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 dismissal and to divorce her." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. 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. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 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."

## HEARING THE WORD

### “Life-giving Complementarity”

God created the universe as a harmonious assembly of various complementary elements. Its various parts, though different, supplement one another to sustain and nurture life. Today’s liturgy focuses on the subject of the relationship between two parts of the human family – men and women, and their complementarity in society and in family structures.

For centuries, the text from the first reading was used to sustain and justify claims of woman’s inferior status to that of man. Such interpretations represent a complete misunderstanding and misuse of this story which, in fact, states the exact opposite. The passage begins with an assertion, “it is not good for a man to be alone”. Up to this point, everything that God had created “was good” – complete and perfect. The man’s “not good” aloneness reflects unfinished creation. God decides to complete his creation providing the man with “a helper as his partner”. A helper is needed when someone lacks sufficient strength or capacity to carry out a task. The man needs the woman because, by himself, he is incomplete and incapable of carrying out God’s given task, to care and cultivate the garden of Eden. No other creature is capable of fulfilling this role, as they are fundamentally different; at best they can be man’s servants, but not his partner. To create the man’s helper

and partner God first puts the man into deep sleep. In the Hebrew understanding, sleep provides an occasion for divine revelation. Then, without man’s participation, God forms another human being who will complement the man. The text symbolically portrays this new being as formed from the man’s rib. There is deep symbolism here. First, both beings will share the same humanity, as they are made of the same matter. Next, the woman comes from the man’s side – she is meant to stand beside the man, not underneath or above. Very significantly, there is an ancient Sumerian story which might have influenced the biblical authors. In that story, a goddess is created. Her name is “the woman of life”. The word for “life” in the ancient Sumerian language is remarkably similar to the Hebrew word for “rib”. Quite possibly the Hebrew writers intended to allude to the woman as “the woman of life” not “the woman of the rib”. This view finds support in Genesis 3:20 where the woman is called “the mother of all the living”. Woman will thus complete creation, and allow the human family to be life-giving.

The author then moves to emphasize that the two beings are equal in nature and status. First, the man recognizes the woman as “born bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh” – both share the same humanity and, on the very fundamental level of existence, they are identical.

Next, the man names the woman using the word which, in Hebrew, means

“wife”. In this statement, he himself is not called “a man” but “a husband”. Here we witness creation of the first family. The creation is now complete with the human family at its pinnacle. This family bond was initiated by the man, which reflects the way in which marriages were made among the Israelites. But then, startlingly, the author states that the man is to leave his father and mother and join himself to the wife. This statement goes against the core practice of a patriarchal society, where the woman was taken from the parents’ home and incorporated into the husband’s family. Why such reversal? Most likely, the author intends to emphasize that creation of the human family surpasses any social norms and practices which are culturally conditioned. The marriage partners are joined to live in a complementary union above the social and cultural divide. The author also implies that the patriarchal system was not God’s intent at creation. It emerged only later as a result of human sin and the fall (cf. Gen 3:16). God created the man and the woman to complement each other and exist in an intimate union of complementarity and equality. Revelation of this divine design and purpose is the true purpose and message of this significant passage from Genesis.

The second reading begins a sequence of readings from the book of Hebrews, which we will follow until the end of Ordinary Time. Today’s passage opens this sequence with a portrayal of Jesus, who fulfils the

role which the human family failed to accomplish. God created humanity to govern creation, "to subdue it" (Heb 5:1-8). Due to their sin and fall, people were and are unable to fulfil this task because creation as well as the human family became disrupted and alienated from God. But what humanity could not achieve, Christ did, by subjecting himself to suffering and death. Emerging victorious in his resurrection, he also became the glorified Lord with all creation subjected to him. As the Risen Lord he also restored the humanity to unity, but on a much greater scale. Hebrews speaks of the family of God's children created by God through Jesus. Jesus became "the pioneer of salvation" by sanctifying the people. As sanctified people, former sinners can live in God's presence. Furthermore, as the author beautifully states, "the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father". This means that in this new family Jesus is the brother to believers. Even though they are human and he is God, "he is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters." Just as God created the human family consisting of husbands and wives, Jesus created a new family by establishing communion between the divine and the human.

The Gospel reading returns to the theme of the human family. The Pharisees who accepted divorce challenged Jesus who forbade it. The law of Moses which most Jews followed allowed for divorce. But divorce could only be initiated by the husband and

served to protect his rights over the wife. Jesus forbade such practices because they denied women their status as complementary marriage partners. Arguing against divorce, Jesus pointed to the creation story citing Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. Both passages indicate that men and women were created in an organic and complementary unity and were meant to exist as equal partners.

Jesus' subsequent teaching on adultery makes this point very clear. The patriarchal society of his day recognized that adultery could only be committed by a woman as a violation of her husband's right to her. By saying that a man commits adultery against a woman marrying another, Jesus emphasizes that the woman has rights over the man as well. Even more surprisingly, Jesus states that the woman could divorce her husband, which was technically impossible in the Jewish society of that time. Both statements describe situations that were unacceptable in a traditional patriarchal society. Making such statements, Jesus reveals that man and woman are equal partners in a marriage relationship, with corresponding rights in regard to one another.

Today's liturgy contains powerful lessons regarding God's vision of creation. It is a creation where different partners exist in complementary union. This union is first visible in the family, where men and women sustain each other as equal partners, with distinct but complementary roles. A similar union exists between Jesus and be-

lievers. Although different in nature, status and function, Jesus and believers are members of one family, with God as its Father. God's creation was distorted by human sins with resulting distortions such as patriarchy, divorce, and social inequalities. However, Christians aware of God's design know the ideal they must strive for, that of equality, complementarity and mutually sustained dignity. Pursuing this ideal, they might consider themselves among those described by the psalmist in the words, "Happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways."

## **LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD**

Complementarity between man and woman has been an issue since earliest times. The liturgy of this Sunday invites us to revisit our attitude towards women, an attitude that should be in line with God's intentions visible in the story of creation. The creation story from Genesis 2 has itself been manipulated and misinterpreted by many people for many generations, and was used to threaten women's dignity and to impair their development. It was frequently used to justify submission of the woman to her male counterpart. Such misinterpretations of the biblical text have continued to lead to the abuse of women. Pope Francis recognized this very well, when speaking to the members of the Academy for Life (Oct 5, 2017), where he plainly said, "the forms of subordination that have sadly marked the history of women, have to be eradicated."

The book of Genesis clearly reveals the mind of God concerning his creation. Man and woman were both created in God's image, and for the purpose of complementing each other. They are meant to be equal in status, live in mutual respect and harmony with one another, with nature and with the creator. As it was beautifully stated by a Christian theologian, "The woman was not made out of his [the man's] head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."

Though we are all aware of this design of God, we are very often blinded by our patriarchal cultures and structures which have made women second class citizens of planet earth. In many African cultures, the woman is treated as inferior and subject to the man. She is expected to remain submissive even to the point of abuse. Women are considered the property of men, especially in cultures where bride price is paid. Women are sometimes not allowed to speak in public, or take up substantial leadership roles, even though they are competent, and make an essential contribution to society. Despite the advancement in civilization, society is quick at depriving women of the opportunity to explore some professional fields which are tagged "for men only".

Our cultures play a great role in our understanding of the role and the person of a woman. However, as Christians, we must rise above, and renounce, those aspects of our cultures that contradict the teaching of Christ.

The second reading invites us to take on the culture of Christ, because we are all his brothers and sisters, and we have one Father. It means we are all equal before God, because Christ has won for us the gift of being children of God. Jesus speaks of the sanctity of marriage vows, which are to be equally upheld by the woman and the man. They are to respect each other, and live out their marriage as a union of equals, because neither of the two, neither man alone nor woman alone, are capable of guaranteeing that human co-existence is lived in the light of the love of God for every creature. Together, men and women "were created, in their blessed difference; together they have sinned, for their presumption to replace God; together, with the grace of Christ, they return to God's presence, to honour the care of the world and the history that He has entrusted to them" (Pope Francis, Oct 5, 2017).

Our cultural conditioning may suggest that women are inferior to men. But we have a sacred duty to embrace the teachings of Christ on equality and dignity of both sexes. The acceptance of this equal dignity lays the foundation for a fruitful and happy life for the entire human family.

## PROVERB

*"When  
the sleeping woman  
wakes,  
mountains move."*

## ACTION

### Self-examination:

What do I think about the relationship between men and women? Are my attitudes shaped by Christ's teaching on the matter, or the patriarchal thinking I inherited from my culture?

As a man, have I ever discriminated against women? How? As a woman, have I ever experienced discrimination or abuse? Did I ever think that I had to accept it because of my alleged "inferior status"?

### Response to God:

This week I will look at those of the opposite sex, whether men or women, seeing them as God's gift to me, as fellow members of my God-made family meant to complement me.

### Response to your World:

In our group, we will have separate meetings for men and women, discussing the topic of gender relations among ourselves. We will then come together and share on the practical steps we can take to grow together towards the ideal presented in today's readings.

## PRAYER

*Dear Lord,  
you have blessed the human race  
with the gift of every person,  
help us to regard everyone  
as special in your eyes.  
Teach us to respect  
every man and woman  
that you have created.  
And grant us the heart  
to work together for your glory.  
We ask this  
through Christ your son  
who is our brother and friend.  
Amen.*