

A reading from the book of Genesis.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground,
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;
and put him the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.
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.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – 27 B

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

We do indeed see Jesus,
who for a little while was made lower than the angels,
now crowned with glory and honour
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
are all from one.
For this reason
Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.



Pause for **THREE** seconds

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – 27 B

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Some Pharisees came, and to test Jesus they asked,
“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

Jesus 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.

Jesus 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.”

People were bringing little children to him
in order that he might touch them;
and the disciples spoke sternly to them.

But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them,

“Let the little children come to me;

do not stop them;

for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

Truly I tell you,

whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child
will never enter it.”

And Jesus took them up in his arms,
laid his hands on them, and blessed them.



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Genesis 2:18-24

As the reader is doubtless aware, this passage comes from the J (Yahwist) story of creation. It is an earlier tradition than the P (Priestly) creation story in Gen 1. Whereas the P story pictures man and woman as the culmination of creation, the J story makes the same theological point by picturing them as its center.

Thus, in the P story human beings are created *after* the animals and in both male and female sexes. Here, however, man (male) is created first, the animals are then created to serve him (naming them indicates control over them), and finally woman is created from his “rib.”

The meaning of this word is uncertain, but it is intended to suggest the common humanity of man and woman (as the P story also does in a different way), as well as the derivative status of woman in relation to man.

Thus, it was the J story rather than the P story that provided the New Testament writers with materials to reinforce the then current view of woman’s subordination to man (see [1 Cor 11:8-9](#); [1 Tim 2:13](#)).

However, the main thrust of Genesis is not the subordination of woman but her complementariness to man. Unlike the animals, she is a real consort—a help fit for him (the Authorized Version has “meet” for “fit,” giving rise to the popular non-word “helpmeet.”). Verse 24 is a conclusion drawn from the story of woman’s creation as just described.

The little word “therefore” in verse 24 is the linchpin of the whole pericope. The story of the rib is an etiological myth designed to explain why it is that a man leaves his parents and marries a woman. It is because man and woman share a common humanity and are complementary to each other, and therefore neither is complete without the other.

“One flesh” means more than merely physical union, though it includes that. “Flesh” in Hebrew means the whole human person in contrast to God, the human person in his/her humanness, with all its historical limitations (Paul will later add the notion of sinfulness to the word “flesh”). Flesh, therefore, includes the “spiritual” as well as the physical aspects of human nature.

Responsorial Psalm: 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6

This psalm portrays an idealized picture of family life in Israel. It also breathes the spirit of Deuteronomy, with its rather naive belief that devotion to the Torah (“fears the Lord . . . walks in his ways”) is rewarded in this world with prosperity and happiness.

But the idea that piety and virtue are the foundations of family life is not obsolete.

As used today, this psalm suits the Genesis story of the institution of marriage and the gospel’s reiteration of Genesis, followed, in the longer form, by the pericope about Jesus’ blessing of the little children.

Reading II: Hebrews 2:9-11

Today we begin a course of six readings from the Letter to the Hebrews. A few words about our critical presuppositions in dealing with this document will therefore be in order.

We would date it about 85 and regard it as written to Greek-speaking Jewish Christians in Italy (probably Rome). These addressees (1) form an esoteric group within the Church; (2) have stagnated instead of grown to Christian maturity.

The writer copes with this situation by an elaborate exposition of the theme of Christ's high priesthood, here used as the basis for a series of pep talks based on a typology of the Church as the "wandering people of God" (Kasemann).

Just as the Israelites wandered in the wilderness between their departure from Egypt and their entry into the Promised Land, so the Christian community exists "between the times," between the Christ-event and the parousia.

Israel stagnated in the wilderness and was punished. How much worse will it be for the Christian community if it neglects an even greater salvation effected through the priestly work of Christ!

In the readings of today and the next two Sundays, the author builds up the case for Jesus' eschatological high priesthood. Although not of the tribe of Levi, Jesus has all the qualifications for the job, including the sharing of our common humanity. He and we have a common origin, and he calls us brothers and sisters (v. 9).

This is, of course, only one side of Hebrews' Christology, for Christ has another origin too. He is also the preexistent Son through whom the world was created ([Heb 1:1-3](#)). Christ was even made perfect (!) through suffering.

But "perfect" here does not mean moral perfection, as though he was not morally perfect at the outset but had to become so; rather, to become perfect means to achieve a goal or a destiny.

It was only by suffering that the Christ could perfectly achieve our salvation and could become our high priest (which is a functional category, not an ontological one). In order to do his work effectively, that is, to plead for us before the Father, the high priest had to have an experiential knowledge of all human infirmities.

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

The long form of this Gospel comprises two pericopes—the first on divorce, the second on the blessing of children. A form-critical analysis would suggest that we have here part of an early catechism, built up of originally separate traditions about Jesus. A section on marriage would be followed immediately by a section on the family.

Jesus' prohibition of divorce is one of the most widely attested sayings in the tradition, being found in Paul ([1 Cor 7:10](#)), Mark-Matthew (the present passage and its parallel in [Matt 19:3-9](#)), and Q ([Matt 5:31-32/Luke 16:18](#)).

The original Q form, best preserved by Luke, enunciates an absolute, unqualified prohibition. Paul, Mark, and Matthew modify the commandment in various ways. Paul introduces the "Pauline privilege" (making a Christian convert free to remarry if the non-Christian partner divorces him/her).

By the device of secret teaching, Mark extends the prohibition of divorce on the part of the husband to

divorce on the part of the wife, thus adapting Jesus' prohibition to Roman law, which, unlike Jewish law, allowed a wife to divorce her husband. Matthew in turn modifies the commandment by introducing into both his Marcan and Q sources the famous "Matthean exception," permitting divorce in the case of the wife's unchastity (*porneia*).

It is clear that when the Church came to treat Jesus' eschatological enunciation of the absolute prohibition of divorce as a community law, it was compelled to adapt and even to modify its absolute character in various ways.

The Marcan version recognizes that divorce was allowed in the Mosaic period because of hardness of heart, that is, sin. Since sin is in principle done away with in Christ, a reversion to the condition before the fall, where divorce was unknown, becomes feasible.

But the New Testament Church realized that despite the new life in Christ, people were still open to temptation and sin, and if Christ's absolute prohibition was to be treated as a law, concessions would have to be made.

The point is not that the particular concessions made in the New Testament, and these only, are valid for all time, but that the New Testament grants to the Church the authority to make concessions that are pastorally necessary, while at the same time keeping Jesus' absolute prohibition before men and women and making it clear that anything short of radical obedience is sinful in the eyes of God, and therefore in need of forgiveness.

The pericope about the blessing of the children has its nucleus in the saying about receiving the kingdom of God as a little child, a saying also attested in a variant form by the Johannine tradition ([John 3:3](#)). The combination of this saying with the story of Jesus' blessing the children may have been taken as a justification for the early Church's practice of baptizing the children of Christian converts (so J. Jeremias).

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