

## 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

### Genesis 2:18-24

**18**The Lord God said: “It is not good for the man” Here Adam represents all of us because “adam” in Hebrew means “man” in the generic sense and the creation account doesn’t distinguish between male and female until after Adam’s “deep sleep.”<sup>5</sup> **to be alone.** Man is “alone” because he is the only bodily creature made in God’s image and likeness.<sup>5</sup> **I will make a suitable partner for him.”** This woman complements man, but she is not a mere service appendage for she corresponds to him, that is, she has a similar nature and is a fit companions for his total being.<sup>4</sup>

**19**So the Lord God formed out of the ground God resumes his work as a potter, forming the birds and animals “out of the ground” just as he had done for Adam.<sup>7</sup> **various wild animals and various birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each of them would be its name.**

**20**The man gave names Animals, named by man and hence under his control, are not fit companions for his total being. They have no nature corresponding to his.<sup>4</sup> The naming showed that God gave the authority over the creatures to man. Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure.<sup>3</sup> (CCC 2417) **to all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all wild animals;** Note that they did not receive the breath of life from God. That was only given to man and this is what makes him essentially different from animals. It means that man has a spiritual principle, which we call a “soul.” It makes man more akin to God than to animals.<sup>2</sup> **but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man.** Man was aware of his aloneness.<sup>2</sup> Adam was different from the animals; he is not determined by bodily instinct for although he is created from “the dust” like the animals, he also has the “breath of life” which sets him apart and gives him freedom. The reason for this is that Adam was called to love, and without freedom, love is impossible.<sup>5</sup>

**21**So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, This sleep is a kind of death; it is as if God suspended the life he gave man, in order to reshape him so that he can begin to live again in another way—by being two, man and woman, and no longer alone.<sup>2</sup> **and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.** God could have made Eve from the dust of the ground just as he had made Adam and the animals and birds but he deliberately chose to make Eve from the man’s bone and flesh to show us that in marriage a man and a woman become one flesh.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to people’s thinking at the time that this was written, man and woman have the same nature and the same dignity, for both have come from the same piece of clay that God shaped and made into a living being.<sup>2</sup>

**22**The Lord God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man,

**23**the man said: “This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called ‘woman,’ for out of ‘her man’ this one has been taken.” For the Jews, “flesh” and “bones” signified the whole human being. This, then, is a figurative way of expressing that both men and women share the same humanity. Both are persons made in God’s image.<sup>5</sup> Note the complementarity rather than the interchangeability of their design. Eve was to be a helper equal to Adam, a sort of divine gift from God. The Hebrew term *ezer neged*, which is used to describe Eve, refers to a superior person or a type of divine assistance.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>24</sup>That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh. This indicates that marriage as willed by God was monogamous.<sup>2</sup> Adam and Eve received the gift of marriage from God and He tells us throughout the Bible to treat this special union with the utmost care. Marriage is one of the biblical metaphors used to describe the covenant relationship between God and his people. The Bride and Bridegroom at the Wedding Feast is Christ's favorite description for the Kingdom of Heaven. This first man and woman were literally made for one another. God did not institute marriage for convenience, nor was it brought about by any culture. Marriage's three aspects are: a man leaves his father and mother in a public act and promises himself to his wife; the man and woman take responsibility for each other's welfare, and love their mate next to God, above all others; and the two become one person in the intimacy and commitment of sexual union, which is reserved for marriage.<sup>1</sup> The human union in "one flesh" is worlds apart from the copulation of animals. While it looks much the same biologically, human sexual union isn't merely a biological reality. It is also a spiritual and theological reality. The human body is meant to reveal and participate in the spiritual mystery of divine love.<sup>5</sup> Note that the use of sexuality was ordained prior to the Fall. The Hebrew word "holy" means "set apart" and it is also the word for "marriage" which was the first sacrament instituted by Christ and which is the created model for the Trinity. The Catholic Church has constantly guarded and defended the unity and indissolubility of marriage from the very beginning in countless documents such as the Council of Florence: Pro Armeniis, the Council of Trent: De Sacram, Vatican II: Gaudium et spes as well as others including encyclicals from Pius XI, Paul VI and John Paul II, especially, Familiaris consortio.<sup>2</sup>

## Hebrews 2: 9-11

*We don't know who wrote Hebrews, but it was obviously a scholar and a deep-thinking theologian. Because of its content, it has been connected with the letters of St. Paul for it faithfully echoes his preaching. He seems to have written to Christians of Jewish background who were very familiar with the Greek language and with the Hebrew culture.<sup>9</sup> The main purpose of this letter is to show that the New Law is the perfection and fulfillment of the Old Law, which it supersedes. It focuses on the idea that Christ's priesthood and sacrifice are superior to those of the Levitical priesthood.<sup>8</sup>*

### Brothers and sisters:

<sup>9</sup>He Here he is talking about Jesus. "for a little while" This refers to the days of his earthly life. was made "lower than the angels," This refers to Jesus in the crisis of his Passion and Death, when he freely humbled himself and lowered himself to suffer punishment and death, sufferings to which angels were not subject. Now, for the rest of time and eternity, Christ will rule over heaven and earth, angels and men.<sup>8</sup> that by the grace of God he might taste death Jesus experienced the separation of his soul from his body from the time he expired on the cross until the time he was raised from the dead. The death of Christ is described as being like a bitter drink which he chose to take in sips, as if savoring it. The "cup" or chalice of the Agony in the Garden comes to mind.<sup>8</sup> for everyone.

<sup>10</sup>For it was fitting that he, This refers to the Father. for whom and through whom all things exist, God is the Creator and in Him all that He has made finds its purpose. in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect The Father made his Son "perfect" in the sense that by becoming man and therefore being able to suffer and die, he was fully equipped to be mankind's representative. <sup>8</sup> through suffering. Ever since the redemption, human suffering has

become a way to perfection.<sup>8</sup> St. Paul tells us that “in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his Body, that is, the Church.” While Christ’s Passion superabundantly completed the salvation of all mankind, mankind must formally cooperate with the grace poured out on the Cross. Paul indicates that this can be accomplished not through the sinner’s prayer, but through suffering.<sup>10</sup> Deena Creamer added: “Jesus entrusts to us a share in His suffering for others so we might learn true love for others. Does He need our sacrifices to add to His already perfect sacrifice? Of course not. But we need them. I am learning that we need to understand the love Jesus has for us by offering our small sufferings for the good of others; after all, we are to imitate Jesus in every way. It is the self-sacrifice that is important, even though it may not be a chosen sacrifice...consider the hardships, struggles or suffering going on in your life as stepping stones to heaven. We cannot go around them, avoid them or run away from them; instead, we must go over them. Each ‘stone’ can bring us closer and closer to our Creator. Inevitably, at some point, you will be able to look back and say: ‘if this hadn’t happened, I never would have...’ That’s what someone coined as ‘retroactive faith’—believing in advance what only makes sense in reverse.”<sup>11</sup> Rom. 8:17 says: “and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” The Catechism tells us that “by the grace of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, the sick person receives the strength and the gift of uniting himself more closely to Christ’s Passion: in a certain way he is CONSECATED to bear fruit by configuration to the Savior’s redemptive Passion. Suffering, a consequence of original sin, acquires a new meaning; it becomes a participation in the saving work of Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> (CCC 1521) 1 Cor. 12:24 “If one member suffers, all suffer together...” 2 Thes. 1:5: For He is using your sufferings to make you ready for His Kingdom. Phil. 1:29 says: “For it is your special privilege to take Christ’s part—not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him.” 1 Peter 5:10 “The God of all grace, who called you to his everlasting glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish those who have suffered a little while.” It is in our suffering that we take on the priestly role proper to every follower of Christ. (This is why the Morning Offering is such a significant daily prayer!) We offer up our own sacrifice of ourselves, to cleanse not only our own souls, but the souls of others, to save not just ourselves, but others from the fires of hell.<sup>10</sup> Suffering makes no sense in the eyes of the world. It is only when it is joined to the suffering of Christ that we understand that it has meaning and that in our suffering we have not been abandoned by God. We have a long tradition of holy men and women who have known suffering starting with Jesus himself, then his mother, Mary (the Mother of Sorrows!), the Apostles (who all suffered for the Faith and all or all but one probably died a martyr’s death), and you can scratch the surface of any Saint and find suffering! The Catholic Church has preserved the understanding and the testimony of redemptive suffering.<sup>11</sup>

**11He who consecrates** Jesus, the High Priest **and those who are being consecrated** The point of being consecrated is to have access to God. Jesus has entered into the Holy of Holies, that is, into heaven itself, where he appears before God on our behalf and the believers are able confidently to make their entrance after him and draw near to God.<sup>4</sup> **all have one origin.** The incarnation of the Son is what makes men his brothers. It is because Jesus shares the blood and flesh of men that he, like them, is a son of Adam.<sup>4</sup> **Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them “brothers.”**

## Mark 10:2-16

*After a period of retirement in Galilee, Jesus resumes his public teaching in the territory where John the Baptist denounced Herod for his adulterous union with Herodias, a denouncement that ultimately cost John his life. It is a perfect setting for the Pharisees to set a trap for Jesus by raising the same issue!<sup>12</sup> With good reason, Mark notes that it is more than a theoretical question: They are testing Jesus. They anticipate that Jesus will deny the legality of divorce and so draw upon himself the wrath of Herod Antipas and his unlawful mistress, Herodias. It was well known that Herod, the ruler of this territory, and his consort had abandoned their spouses in order to remarry. The Pharisees hope Jesus will meet the same fate as John the Baptist by making the same outspoken mistake.<sup>15</sup>*

**2**The Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, “Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?” They were testing him.

**3**He said to them in reply, “What did Moses command you?”

**4**They replied, “Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her.” In Deuteronomy 24:1, a man who found “something unclean,” that is, shameful, in his wife was permitted to divorce her, provided he gave her a written notice of her dismissal as public proof of her freedom to marry another man. The question concerning what constituted something unclean was debated between the two rabbinical schools: that of Shammai limited it to something moral or religious in nature, and that of Hillel allowed practically anything that annoyed the husband.<sup>15</sup>

**5**But Jesus told them, “Because of the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this commandment. Jesus cut through all their arguments and went to the divine intention for marriage. The purpose of the permission was certainly not to promote divorce; rather, accepting an evil situation, the law sought to protect the wife from abuse and to assure her rights. Divorce itself, however, does not correspond to God’s original intention for the married couple. They are, in his mind, one flesh, and man does not have the right to separate what God has bonded together.<sup>12</sup> Marriage is a covenant and not a contract! The Church has always understood Christ’s words as requiring strict monogamy, just as Christ would never leave His Church in favor of a new bride. The Sacrament of Matrimony gives spouses the grace to love each other exclusively and permanently, and thereby image and manifest the love Christ has for His Church.<sup>16</sup>

**6**But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female. God alone is the Creator of marriage and the laws that govern it. Jesus demonstrates this by citing Gen. 1:27 and 2:24, passages that describe God’s design for marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman. This marital bond is spiritual, exclusive and cannot be dissolved. Since it is forged by God himself, it cannot be broken by any civil or religious authority.<sup>3</sup> (CCC 1603, 1640)<sup>13</sup>

**7**For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,

**8**and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh.’

**9**Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate.” This was a hot topic. Mark is writing for a gentile audience and the pagan Romans practiced abortion, adultery, divorce, chemical contraception for the upper class and infanticide for the lower class.

**10**In the house the disciples again questioned Jesus about this.

**11**He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; The emphasis is on the words, “against her” for in Jewish law, a man could only commit adultery against another man (by having relations with the latter’s wife). He could not commit adultery against his wife, though she, by extra-marital sex, could commit adultery against him. Jesus’ interpretation of the Genesis text means there is a personal union in the marriage bond, which

elevates the woman to real equality with her husband. If a man breaks that unity, he sins against her.<sup>12</sup>

**12**and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” The woman is also bound. Though Jewish women were not permitted to initiate divorce, there were cases where a woman deserted her husband to live with and even marry another. Herodias is a case in point. Jesus brands this act as adultery.<sup>12</sup>

**13**And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them, It was probably the eve of the Day of Atonement when it was common for parents to bring their children to the scribes to be blessed.<sup>4</sup> **but the disciples rebuked them.** The disciples were well-intentioned but they were applying the wrong criteria. Jesus had just told them in Mark 9:37 that “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.” These words express simply and graphically the key doctrine of man’s divine sonship: God is our Father and we are his sons and daughters, his children; the whole of religion is summed up in the relationship of a son with his good father.<sup>14</sup>

**14**When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Jesus welcomes children into the kingdom of God and so lays a foundation for the Church’s practice of Infant Baptism.<sup>13</sup>

**15**Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.” The point is that children are unable to fend for themselves; they are dependent and thus know how to receive. The kingdom comes as a gift from God—we don’t earn it. We must receive it as children receive everything they need.<sup>17</sup>

**16**Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them. Jesus heals the sick and blesses the little children by laying hands on them and the apostles will do the same thing in his name. The Church has kept this sign in its sacramental liturgies.

*Some of the material for this commentary has been taken from: (1) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (2) “The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch” (3) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (4) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (5) “Theology of the Body for Beginners” by Christopher West, (6) “Equal Is Not Enough...’On True Feminine Genius” an article in the Spring 2006 magazine “Canticle” by Dr. Pia de Solenni who was the first woman to receive the Pontifical Academies Award from Pope John Paul II for her dissertation on sexual complementarity in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, (7) “The Book Of Genesis Chapters 1—11” by William G. Heidt, O.S.B., (8) “The Navarre Bible: Hebrews,” (9) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:2003” by Aelred R. Rosser; (10) “Bible Basics” by Steve Kellmeyer; (11) “The Fullness of Faith” by Deena Creamer; (12) “Mark: Good News for Hard Times” by George T. Montague, S.M., (13) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark,” (14) “The Navarre Bible: St. Mark,” (15) “The Gospel Of Mark” by William Barclay, (16) “Catholic For A Reason: The ‘Real Presence’ Of The Marriage Bond” by Leon J. Suprenant, Jr., and (17) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:1997” by Lawrence E. Mick.*

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*