

Proper 22-B; Pentecost 18
October 8, 2006

Genesis 2:18-24; Mark 10:2-9

An eight year-old boy asked his girlfriend to marry him. She turned him down, saying that in her family, only relatives marry. She explained it this way: “If you and me were relatives, we could get married, but we are not. In my family, my daddy married my mommy, my grandpa married my grandma, and all my uncles married my aunts. So you see, we can’t get married, ‘cause we are not relatives.”

Love the logic, don’t you?

I came across a story about St. Valentine, and this is a story I do not remember hearing before. It seems that Valentine, a priest of the Church for whom Valentine’s Day is named, was martyred for defending the great and godly institution of marriage.

The emperor of Rome at the time, Claudius, passed a law banning marriages. His reason was simple. Men would not volunteer to join his Roman army with wives and girlfriends to leave behind. Valentine knew that God instituted the family and His will included great marriages. So, he kept on performing marriage ceremonies – but secretly. He would whisper the words of the ceremony, while listening for soldiers on the steps outside.

One night, he did hear footsteps. The couple he was marrying escaped, but he was caught. He was thrown in jail and sentenced to death.

Valentine tried to stay cheerful while imprisoned, and many young people came to the jail to visit him—actually performing marriage ceremonies while imprisoned. The jailer’s daughter would often visit Valentine in his cell, and they sat and talked for hours. She believed he did the right thing by ignoring the Emperor and performing marriage ceremonies. On the day, Valentine was to die, he left her a note thanking her for her friendship and loyalty. He signed it, "Love from your Valentine." That note started the custom of exchanging love notes on Valentine’s Day. It was written on the day he died, February 14, 269 A.D.

This is the first instance I am aware of that a Christian, and in this instance, a priest, was martyred for upholding the sacrament of marriage.

I have a question for you: What is a major status symbol in this greedy I-want-more, or as Fr. Commins would say, *I-me-mine* consumer culture of ours is something no money can buy. You cannot inherit it. You cannot discover it. You cannot even own it. What is it?

It is a miracle marriage, a long-lasting, loving marriage of two committed people. It used to be that Golden Anniversary couples, couples such as Fr. Amend and Joan who celebrated their 50th anniversary last month, it used to be that couples such as they that got our attention. And they do, only because such marriage records are becoming fewer and fewer. Divorce statistics have sky rocketed, the average lifespan of marriages has dropped alarmingly. One writer stated that we have gone from “death do us part” to “satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.” In a culture that has made the shelf life of husbands, wives, and families as disposable and as perishable as a fresh container of milk, it seems that any marriage without an expiration date of ten years is, well, a miracle.

Agatha Christi, the famous mystery novelist, once said, “An archaeologist – now think what an archaeologist is – an archaeologist is the best husband a woman can have. The older she gets, the more interested he is in her.”

Professor H.W. Jurgen, a West German sociologist, claims that married couples chat with one another 70 minutes a day in the first year of their marriage. This drops to 30 minutes a day in the second year and then only to 15 minutes a day in the 4th. His research shows that by the eighth year, a husband and wife, typically, share hardly any small talk and become nearly silent with one another....

I share this study with you, only because a parishioner came up to me recently, and in all seriousness, shared with me that he has not spoken to his wife in over a week. As I prepared to respond in my best caring pastoral mode, he quipped, “Yeh, I was afraid to interrupt her.”

This parishioner will remain nameless for his own protection.

Contrary to what we have been hearing for many years, marriage is making a comeback! According to the National Review, the health of U.S. marriages is improving. Data from the National Center for Health Statistics and the Census Bureau gives some hopeful signs: while the marriage rate is declining, so is the divorce rate, from 23 divorces per 1,000 to 20; the number of married couples with children increased by 700,000 from

1990 to 1995; and moms seem to be staying home with their children in greater numbers, as the rate of mothers participating in the workforce is beginning to decline after a steady rise between 1960 and 1990. (National Review 3/10/97)

In this morning's gospel reading from Mark, read by Deacon Ed, in his response to his old nemesis, the Pharisees, Jesus actually focuses more on the divinely created nature of marriage than on the awkward human machinery of divorce. This past week, we clergy received an e-mail from one of our peers requesting information about the church's canons regarding divorce. My immediate reaction to this request is that we ought to take Jesus' example and build up marriage in stead of exploring and explaining ways to destroy it.

Therefore, taking my cue from our Lord, I wish to share some thoughts with you this morning about the miracle of marriage as instituted by Yahweh God from the earliest days of creation and upheld by our Lord Jesus Christ.

I came across an interesting article written by Ellen Frankel, her thesis being that as women were a part of a patriarchal society and did not have a prominent role in the learned texts, they developed their own folklore: traditions, and customs that have survived through the ages. The TORAH, that is the first five books of the Moses, or what is commonly referred to as the LAW, teaches that in creation, it is God who creates human beings.

About that, Frankel writes, "Our daughters ask, 'Why does woman emerge from a man's body?' The answer to this question lies in the meaning of the Hebrew word for *rib*, which does not precisely mean *rib*, but rather *side*. Eve comes forth only as *flesh of* (Adam's) *flesh*, not as *bone of his bone*; C-section rather than by bone graft. Thus, God serves as Adam's midwife, not as his surgeon." Interesting thought...

As with anything that comes before us dealing with scripture, let us turn to scripture for proof and clarification. I invite you to turn in your pew bibles to page one, to Genesis, chapter one, and in the right hand column, I invite you to read together with me verses 26-27:

26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

In these two verses we have the abbreviated version of the creation of a man and a woman. Much occurs during this awesome event of the creation of us humans. From chapter two in Genesis, we learn that apparently there was a significant time frame during which man existed without a woman present. (No, I am not going there. That's a barn door through which I shall not pass.) To learn more about the creation of a woman, we need to turn over to page two, to chapter two, to the right hand column, and to verse 18. I invite you to read verse 18 with me:

18 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..., what did Yahweh God do? Read verses 19-20 with me:

19 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.

20 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.

Here at the end of verse 20, after all that has been created, the animals, the birds and every living creature, we learn that man still does not have *helper partner*. I am spiritually troubled to accept the New Revised Standard Version's use of the term *partner*. I especially have difficulty in accepting this term *partner* when our present day culture uses this term in association with same sex blessings and or marriages. I wonder – is there a subtle message being given here by the editors of the Bible we have in our hands? The new Revised Standard Version is the only version that uses the term *partner*. The King James Version, the now out-of-print Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, and the New American Standard Bible all do not use the term *partner*, and neither shall I.

The New American Standard Bible, which has the reputation of being the “Rock” of scripture, reads for the end of verse 20, *but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him*. This use of this term *suitable* is very significant in this context. The listing of definitions of the Hebrew word for *suitable* includes – are you ready for this - ‘opposite’ and ‘opposite to.’ For me, the plot is thickening.

Adam needs a suitable – opposite - helper. So what does Yahweh God do? I invite you to read verses 21 and 22 with me:

21 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.

22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Let's take a moment to unpack what we just read. First of all, Yahweh God assumed the role of an anesthesiologist by putting Adam to sleep. Then God took one of his ribs. The Hebrew term for *rib* is not used anywhere else in the Bible as it is used here. The Hebrew term for *rib* usually refers to the side of a building or the side of a room. But when this term is used anatomically, it refers to the **area** of the ribs and includes not only bone, but also the flesh and muscle as well.

Removed from Adam was a significant section of his anatomy, nearly one-half of his physical being removed to create his suitable opposite – *woman*. We cannot dismiss lightly, especially in the context in which our current culture attempts to redefine marriage, we cannot just gloss over what we just read from Genesis. Nearly half of man was used to create woman.

Look again at verse 23 in which we read, *bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*. Could it be that Adam is affirming that God took flesh as well as bone out from his side and used them to create Eve?

There is a law of physics that says, “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. What is the first thing this young couple do? I invite you to read with me verse 24:

24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

What was just separated longs to be rejoined, longs to become one once again! That which is separate has a natural desire to become one once again. A part of Adam is missing and he beckons the missing part to rejoin him. Although the woman emerges from the man's body, the man ultimately merges back with her. The merging of a man with a woman is the awesome completeness of human creation. And of this union, Yahweh God proclaimed, “What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (Mark 10:9). Human wholeness depends upon the joining of the opposite to complete the divine image. Praise be to God!

And what did our Lord have to say about this arrangement? I invite you to turn to page 921, to Mark, chapter 10, beginning with verse 6, and I once again, invite you to read along with me:

6 But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'
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, let no one separate."

Jewish midrash, or what we would call commentary on the scriptures, states that "first man was created entirely by God, but the making of a man that is born is shared by the joining of male and female: the white is from the male, out of which brain and sinews are formed; the red is from the female, out of which the skin and flesh and the blood are made; and the spirit and the life and the soul are from the Holy One, blessed be he. Thus all three have a share in him."

Parents have a human aspect in that they die. But they also have a divine aspect in that they bring forth birth. A Jewish sage by the name of Akiba wrote, "Although man was crated from the ground, and Eve from Adam, and now it is impossible for man to propagate without woman, and for woman without man, yet even now, it is not possible for both of them to propagate without the Shekhina – the presence of Yahweh God." Life continues to be a miracle of God.

From chapter one of Genesis, we learn that humans are created in the likeness of God. Another Jewish sage, Ben Assai, wrote: "Whoever does not engage in the propagation of the species is deemed by scripture to diminish, as it were, the likeness." (REPEAT) In other words, in preserving the human race, we preserve the image of God in the world. The preservation of the human race can only be achieved by the union of a man and a woman, created in the likeness of God, united in marriage. This is not a dictate that everyone is to marry, but those who do marry are to be man and wife!

This is a basic fundamental, traditional Christian belief. Yet it is this very fundamental belief of faith that is on trial in our diocese, the National Church, and yes, throughout the world. Satan very much is on the attack.

By your own understanding of scriptures, and from whatever small addition I may have provided to that understanding this morning, is there any wiggle room whatsoever for marriage to be anything else other than the *rejoining* of a man to a woman, thus achieving the awesome completeness of divine creation? Lest we fall into the same trap as the Pharisees, our focus ought to be the same as Christ's, and that is to concentrate on defending and lifting up marriage as the sacrament and covenant relationship God intended it to be from the very beginning of creation.

To all of you for whom every day continues to be a record in your marriage, God bless you!