

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)  
(Genesis 2:18-24 / Mark 10:2-16)  
07.10.2018  
Sexuality

Our two readings today speak specifically of marriage and divorce. Yet that is not all, they also speak more generally of sexuality and sex. In the last verse of our reading from the book of Genesis: “This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body”, the expression “joins his wife and they become one body” is commonly interpreted in Hebrew as an image for the sexual act.

However before considering sexuality, the first verse of our reading makes a bold statement. We are told that “it is not good that the man should be alone.”

Before going any further it is important to say that these words do not mean that celibacy is not good. God has called – and continues to call – men and women to live celibate lives for the service of his people. Celibacy, like marriage, is a call and a gift from God. Both states of life are necessary for the up-building of God’s Kingdom.

What the biblical author means when he writes that “it is not good that the man should be alone” is that, whether we are married or single, we should not be on our own. And here we could ask ourselves whether celibacy is possible without a community. It seems to me that one aspect of the problem for priests in the Catholic church of Latin rite is not that they are single but that they are alone. As we know celibacy is not absolutely necessary for ministry, I think it is legitimate to ask if it should continue to be made a requirement for ordination. The Catholic church could be led to look at this question in the future.

Beyond this question, whether we are married or single, we all need companionship and tenderness, support and encouragement. We should not be left alone when we have to deal with our sexual life, and the way we relate to others.

In our Christian communities, there should be places and times when people can speak about the real stuff that weighs on their shoulders. The famous pastoral counsellor and physician Paul Tournier once declared: “Nothing makes us so lonely as our secrets.” We should be able to speak about sex, about our sexual impulses, and all that they entail without being afraid of being judged and condemned but with the hope of being respected and helped.

Another cause of the problem which is relevant both for the single state and for married life is that, in the Church, we have often failed to speak adequately about sexuality, not only about having sex or not but about the fact that we have to live our sexuality whether we have sex or not. The high rates of divorce and the decline in marriage in our so-called Christian countries, the increase of use of internet pornography, the ongoing revelations of sexual abuse committed by Catholic priests, show that what we say about human sexuality – when we say anything at all – does not help people to grow in maturity and in freedom.

To speak about sexuality is not an easy thing to do because it touches the whole of who we are and also the manner in which we relate to others and to the world. Our body, our emotions, our psychology and our spirituality are impacted by our sexuality and the way we live and express it.

Yet if we do not speak about it, who is going to do it? If we do not bring the light of Christ to bear on this subject, what is going to happen?

If we want to deal with our sexuality in a better way, if we want to help one another in the longing to become more fully human, the first step is to be humble about our sexuality, more realistic about our expectations in this domain. To choose humility and truth as starting point should help us to let go of all that, in the way we speak and behave, may give the impression that it is possible for us to master our sexuality completely, in a way that means we've got it all together.

Sexuality is a source of restlessness within us which needs to be channelled in a proper way. It is a fire which has to be tended to with care, attention and patience; it can be a source of energy, of passion, of life just as it can become dangerous and destructive. It is important for us to be aware that we are not dealing here only with sex: emotional manipulation and abuse of power can be expressions of an immature sexuality.

Whether we are single or married, we gain nothing and we send out the wrong message when we want others to believe that we are in definitive and total control of the fire within us. Our sexuality, whether we have a sexual relationship or not requires a long schooling in humility, respect and patience.

Sexuality is not just a biological or physical accident to our nature. We are fundamentally sexual persons and sexuality is primarily relational. So in our sexual education and in our growth in maturity and freedom we need one another. As married or single people, we need to reach out to our brothers and sisters in humanity in order to find stability in our emotional and sexual lives. The Church has the mission to help us in this regard. It should help us to make sense of this whole area of life.

With the Gospel as our guide and the wisdom of a long tradition, as Christians, we should be able to create a new atmosphere around sexuality. For example, in the way we deal with it and talk about it, we should not allow our sexuality, this good gift from God, to remain confined in the dark corners of abuse, guilt and shame.

We believe that sexuality plays an essential role in the task we face of becoming fully human. So let us not forget that sexuality plays equally an essential role in the task we face of building up more genuinely Christian and truly loving communities.