

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Genesis 2:18-24

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

Hebrews 2:9-11

Mark 10:2-16

The Garaventa Center

The University of Portland

Rev. Charles B. Gordon, C.S.C.

The Catholic Church has its ironies. This Sunday is one of them. All over the world today, hundreds of thousands of unmarried priests are preaching to hundreds of millions of *married* Catholics about *marriage*. And the millions of married folks, good Catholics that they are, will listen patiently, confining themselves to an occasional cringe, smirk, giggle or groan at the words of the earnest celibates who presume to pontificate about a sacrament, a way of life, that they've never lived. Well, there's no use putting it off. We might as well get started.

Getting married, today, isn't logical. It used to be that most everyone got married. It was taken for granted. Few people stopped to think whether it was a reasonable thing to do. But today people have a choice. The options are all too obvious. Couples consider the possibility of marriage with their eyes open. And when they do, they often find the word "FOREVER" staring back at them. "Let no one separate what God has joined," for as long as you both shall live. FOREVER. But surely that's not reasonable! The world changes. People change. It's not logical to promise myself to another forever. I can barely speak for the person I am *now*. How can I speak for the person I will be in twenty years, or five years, or tomorrow? It isn't reasonable to pledge the rest of my life to someone.

No, it isn't reasonable. And I think that's why people do it, because

people who get married are in *love*, and *forever* is the language of love. Real lovers don't promise to stay together, as long as it is mutually fulfilling, or until that big promotion comes through, or until someone more interesting comes along. Pick up any book of love poetry -- even bad love poetry. You will read, I am yours until the stars fall from the sky, or the seas dry up, or it snows in the Sahara - in other words -- forever.

People, thank God, are not as rational as they sometimes claim to be, and no loving relationship between two of them could be sorted out by the best logician in the world. Love makes us want to burst the bounds of reason -- to do something outrageous -- to write our lover's name across the sky -- to fight dragons -- to get married -- to say "forever." And that is as it should be.

But the passionate, romantic intoxication that launches us into marriage, can sometimes, ironically, threaten the very permanence it has embraced. We expect our marriage partner to be everything for us: perfect lover, best friend and fount of wisdom. We expect that person to insure our total fulfillment -- to make our every ambition, dream, and longing a reality. You might say we want our partner to be God for us. And when our spouse fails, (as he or she must fail) to meet our outrageous expectations, we begin to fear our marriage has failed. In fact, of course, *we* have failed -- failed to realize that there is an emptiness in each of us that no human being can fill: an emptiness created by a loving God, to be filled by God alone.

I wonder if you've ever had a chance to study the writings of the great women mystics of the Middle Ages. They use the most passionate imagery imaginable to describe their relationship with God. To modern eyes the imagery can seem blatantly sexual. We are tempted to feel

condescending toward these women -- to think of them as poor souls, trapped in their cloisters, forced to misdirect toward God emotions and longings that should have found healthy expression with another human being. But just maybe, it was they who were wise, and we who should be pitied. -- pitied for burdening the frail human shoulders of our spouses with expectations that only God can satisfy. I think it is fair to say that there are three partners in a Christian marriage. The third loving partner, the silent partner, if you will, is God. A married couple can't always be facing one another. They need, rather, to face *together* toward our Lord.

Let me conclude with a prayer for a fiancée or wife attributed to William Henry Temple Gairdner (1873-1928):

That I may come near to her, draw me nearer to thee than to her; that I may know her, make me know thee more than her; that I may love her with the perfect love of a perfectly whole heart, cause me to love thee more than her and most of all. Amen. Amen.

That nothing may be between me and her, be thou between us, every moment. That we may be constantly together, draw us into separate loneliness with thyself. And when we meet breast to breast, my God, let it be on thy own. Amen. Amen.