

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity
October 7, 2018

+

The coming of Jesus Christ could not mean business as usual! It was not a matter of “glad to see you Jesus; wish you could stay longer!” No. *Something decisive was offered* to every man and woman when God became incarnate and was our Redeemer by dying for us. The thing which was offered is *intimacy with God*. The New Testament is chock full of language indicating this new relationship. Scripture talks about our becoming members of God’s *household*, members of Christ’s *body*. And no one but the Lord Himself instructed us to call Go our Father. The Incarnation, God in the flesh, was *the game changer*.

This reunion of God and man was accomplished by Christ’s death on the Cross. His death provided the sacraments as the agency by which this personal relationship is born and then nurtured and developed. The assent of our free will is essential. But *we can only accept what is on offer*. If I invite you for lunch on Tuesday you cannot decide to come to dinner on Thursday!

The *Catechism* describes Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist as *sacraments of initiation*. They establish and continue to promote the growth of faith. Penance and Holy Unction are *sacraments of healing*. They bring God’s grace as remedies for post-baptismal sin and protection in sickness. Then there are the *sacraments in the service of communion*: Holy Orders and Holy Matrimony. In both of these the focus is shifted from the recipient as sole beneficiary to equipping the recipient *for the good of the whole Church*. In marriage it is the spouse and family who are the object of one’s concern. In Holy Orders, a soul is strengthened to serve *all* the faithful.

Today’s gospel puts the focus on marriage. When our Lord was asked if it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife the answer Jesus gave was NO. In order to fully understand why the answer is NO we must again remember that the coming of Jesus Christ did not mean business as usual. *Something decisive happened*. His coming offers reunion of mankind with Almighty God, *and on His terms*.

In the *Book of Genesis* we are told marriage was given in the very moment when God created male and female in His Own image and likeness. And our Lord says “From the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity
October 7, 2018

+

a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.” Since they were made in His image, the married man and woman reflect something of God Himself. And what they reflect is the loving interpersonal relationship of the family of God: the Holy Trinity. The union and love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is reflected in the man and woman in creation. This is not just a belief for Catholics! It is part of creation as God ordered it. It is true whether we accept it or not.

Like everything else human, marriage is distorted by the sinful condition. And, as with everything else in human life, marriage has a Redeemer: Jesus Christ. The New Covenant between God and man, made possible by the Blood of Christ, once again makes this union of things in Heaven and things on earth. And our Catholic faith tells us to settle for nothing less.

Christ’s death brings about this reunion. Our blessed Lord provides the grace of chastity and celibacy for *all* men and women, married and unmarried. Marriage is not a requirement for the Kingdom of Heaven, and St Paul even counsels *against* marriage if it will distract a soul from the pursuit of holiness. The pursuit of holiness is everyone’s homework. But the reason marriage is a sacrament is the grace given helps a Christian couple make the love of Christ a present reality in the world. And the world needs the love of Christ made present. A married man and woman do this through the joys and trials of daily living for and towards each other.

Christ said NO to divorce. Indissolubility is an integral aspect of marriage because the union between Christ and humanity cannot be broken. *Christ cannot be separated from His Church*. Thank God He cannot be separated, not even by our sin! This means divorce is not so much a sin as a lie. And as with all Christ asks of you and me, marriage vows are not impossible to keep. It is Jesus Christ Himself Who confirms the goodness of marriage, and promises *the necessary grace* for fidelity and permanence to the Christian couple as they follow Him in His Paschal Mystery.