

Twenty Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 7, 2018
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Reflection

Today's first reading gives us a picture of Adam before his fall into original sin. He was still in the state that Pope St. John Paul II calls "original solitude." Adam was in perfect communion with God, walking in the paradise of Eden before the Fall; a "unique, exclusive and unrepeatable relationship." But God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone." He knew that Adam was alone, even if Adam didn't realize it himself. So God brought all the animals of the world before Adam, to see what he would name them. In a way, Adam was helping God with the act of creation. He distinguished the different animals, evaluating them and giving them names. With Adam, creation became aware of itself as creation. Each encounter let Adam know himself as different from the creatures he met. Unlike the birds he was self-conscious: he knew where he ended and where the world began. Unlike the animals of the field he had free will: he could determine himself. His choices would constitute his being. Knowing himself to be superior to and different from the other animals, "there was not found a helper as his partner." Adam was still on his own, and that was not enough. And that's true for us as well. Our work and our play are not enough to define us, to fulfill us, to sanctify us. We're made for relationship. God put Adam into a deep sleep, a sign of providence and intervention. God made woman, wonder and delight:

Gen 2:18-24
Ps 128
Heb 2:9-11
Mk 10:2-16

"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." For Adam and Eve, grace changed original solitude into original unity. No longer would they say "we are," but "we are - for each other." Grace elevates the reasoned choice of couples for marriage, changing them into man and wife, one flesh.

Jesus looked back to these truths of Scripture to explain why marriage is indissoluble, why we cannot end a valid marriage when it longer suits us. "What God has joined together, let no one separate." Instead of ending marriage, couples rely on God to strengthen their union, "growing toward oneness (GS 48)" with fidelity. Grace lets them live for each other, with each attending to the good of their spouse. St. Thomas Aquinas has this to say about the grace of the sacrament of marriage:

"Wherever God gives the faculty to do a thing, He gives also the helps whereby man is enabled to make becoming use of that faculty (ST 4.42.3)." God gives us marriage, and he helps us to live it.

We need this grace, because love requires sacrifice. Couples follow Jesus, "the pioneer of their salvation [who was made] perfect through sufferings." Following him gives the grace necessary to renounce the self and carry the cross. But grace also makes marriage fruitful. Openness to life lets love grow through the birth of children, received as a gift of God.

The psalm says, "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table." And these words are true even for couples who want children but cannot have them. They are called to be a sign of God's love in the Church and in the community; witnesses for his love bringing others to faith; instruments of hospitality sharing their wealth; channels of grace raising each other in virtue and holiness.

Difficulties come for every couple. The original unity of Adam and Eve fell to original sin. It wreaks pain and toil, recrimination, lust and domination. The man "loses sight of the gift that woman was and is. He forgets what he had understood in his first glimpse of her; that she is 'bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh,' a person, his match in every way.' The woman's desire is for her "husband" (broadly defined) even though he wishes only to dominate her. Even when she knows he is using her."¹ But the Church asks married couples to "make the most of the present time, and with patience await the glory that is to come (LG 35)." You don't face your difficulties alone. Jesus walks with you, teaching with his word, sustaining with his body and blood, loving through his Church, guiding by his example. So treat each other with patience. On this Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary, ask Joseph and Mary for their prayers. Give to each other a total gift of self, body and soul. In this way marriage "grows better and grows greater (GS 49)."

¹ Deborah Savage, "Reflections on the Revolution", *First Things*, October 2018, Number 286, Page 22.