

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – B
Fr. Chad S. Green
Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
07 October 2018

Genesis 2:18-24
Psalm 128
Hebrews 2:9-11
(1 John 4:12) Mark 10:2-16

How Is God Calling Me to Love Other People?

I didn't grow up expecting that one day I would be a priest. God calls most people to the good and beautiful vocation of marriage, and I didn't have a reason to think that it would be any different for me. All the things described in our First Reading from Genesis were the same things I hoped to find someday in a wife: someone to help me feel not alone; someone made just for me; someone to make me feel fulfilled.¹

And when I graduated college, it seemed like my life was starting to take shape in that direction. I pictured myself living somewhere in the Seattle area; working for a structural engineering firm. I would eventually meet someone special, fall in love, get married, and raise a family.

+++

So, when the idea of becoming a priest entered into my heart, that didn't seem to fit with the Genesis image I had in mind. It took me a lot of discernment to get to where I am today. And it took many years of not only discerning my call to priesthood, but also discerning if I was willing to let go of the Genesis image I had envisioned for my life as a husband and father.

It was the case for me (and I think is the case for many men) that when I first went to seminary, I was there to "test it out" – to see if God was really calling me to be a priest. So, even in seminary, there was an openness to the possibility that God might *not* be calling me to be a priest. That I might eventually leave seminary and perhaps still end up getting married someday.

Even as a seminarian discerning priesthood – at least in the early stages – there was an ongoing consideration of the vocation to marriage.

But, at some point, there had to be a transition. I couldn't go through all the years of seminary with the attitude of "testing it out". I couldn't fully discern the vocation to priesthood while still holding onto the possibility of a vocation to marriage.

+++

Now, there isn't time in just one homily to cover all the years of my discernment of priesthood. There were many important moments along the way that the Lord used to help me come to the point of committing to the vocation to priesthood. But there was one particular moment in which the Lord helped me reshape the way in which I was asking the question about my vocation, and, ultimately, better understand my call to priesthood.

While preaching last week's homily, I realized that several of my homilies reference important things that happened to me during the time that I was *taking a break* from seminary. Which, I guess, shows how much the Lord is always working on all of us, even when we think we're taking a break.

The reason I took a break from seminary was because I felt stuck in my discernment and unable to move forward. I felt called to be a priest, yet at the same time I couldn't let go of the desire for marriage. All those things described in Genesis were still attractive to me.

And then one day, as I was praying about whether to be a priest or get married, the Lord showed me something important. He helped me see that there was a lot of "I", "me", and "my" in my discernment of marriage: I wanted to meet someone who fulfilled my dreams; I wanted someone to help me feel not alone; I wanted someone to love me; I wanted someone to make me happy. These are all good things for us to hope for, but they're not the only thing.

Up to that point, the discernment of my vocation had been imbalanced toward what *I* wanted for *myself*. My thoughts were limited to how would marriage or priesthood make *me* happy and fulfilled. It's important and good to ask questions about and look for what makes us happy and fulfilled. Because God certainly speaks to us through our good and holy desires.

But what is also important – what had been missing for me in my discernment – is to also ask: *How is God calling me to love other people?*

Now, this realization didn't immediately answer all my vocation questions. Rather, it helped me *reshape* my vocation questions. And, once I started to honestly ask questions about and seek answers to how my vocation related to others, my discernment about priesthood started to become clearer.

+++

Our readings today point to the importance of considering the other in the vocation to marriage. The First Reading from Genesis describes the ideal picture of marriage that we all hope for; that God has built into our hearts. It's a reading commonly selected by a bride and groom to be read at their Wedding Mass. The Gospel is also about marriage, but it would never be chosen by a bride and groom for their Wedding Mass, would it?

So how did the Pharisees get from the ideal Genesis image of marriage to asking Jesus about how to get out of a marriage?² It comes from an attitude that solely seeks to fulfill *myself*. The Pharisees were accurate in what they asked Jesus.³ Moses did permit a man to divorce his wife whenever he was “displeased with her.”⁴ That, simply put, comes from a hardness of heart that only seeks what fulfills *me* and makes *me* happy.⁵ And if what pleases *me* is my only consideration in marriage, then it will be difficult for me to stay committed to it.

In the vocation to marriage, God calls us to more than what fulfills me and makes me happy. God calls us to also ask: *How is God calling me to love other people?*

+++

Now, sometimes it can happen that there are real and serious problems that exist in a marriage that might be out of our control, that we didn't ask for, that we honestly might not be able to resolve, and that make it impossible to stay together. That's not what anybody is expecting, or planning, or hoping for when they enter into marriage.

But my hope for all you married folks is that you are inspired by God's plan for you revealed in Genesis, and encouraged by Jesus' words to keep working on your marriages. To see marriage as not only a self-fulfillment, but as the primary way that God is making you and your spouse holier.⁶ The primary way that God is softening your hearts.

The Catechism teaches us that marriage helps us "overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one's own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving."⁷ All you married folks already know what I'm talking about, because you're living it out – God has already been working on you. God has already been calling you to ask: *How is God calling me to love other people?* As a husband or wife, father or mother?

+++

And, as my own discernment of priesthood showed me, this question isn't only for married folks. As a priest, God continues to call me to ask: *How is God calling me to love other people?* As a single person, a widow, a religious or consecrated, as a child or teenager, God is always calling each of us to ask: *How is God calling me to love other people?* Today, in this moment, in all the particular circumstances and situations of my life *right now*.

It's only by continuing to ask that question: *How is God calling me to love other people?*
that we will truly experience the Love and fulfillment that we all desire.⁸

¹ Genesis 2:18, 23-24

² Mark 10:2

³ Mark 10:2-4

⁴ Deuteronomy 24:1; Mark 10:4

⁵ Mark 10:5

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 1601:

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.

⁷ CCC 1609

⁸ See Gospel Acclamation for today's Mass from 1 John 4:12:

If we love one another, God remains in us
and his love is brought to perfection in us.