

HOMILY ~ 27th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME OCTOBER 2/3, 2021

There was a man having a conversation with his father. His parents were getting advanced in years. His mother had Alzheimer's disease and had been in a memory care facility for five years. She could not remember who anyone was. She could not even remember who she was. His father insisted upon going to the facility every morning to have breakfast with his wife, and there he would spend most of the day. The son told his father: "You do not have to go to see mom every day, and you certainly do not have to go early in the morning to have breakfast with her. She doesn't even remember who you are." His father said: "Your mother does not remember who I am, but I remember who she is." I was so touched by that. Wouldn't it be great to grow old with someone who loved you like that?

We heard in the Gospel today: "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become but one flesh." Marriage forms a unique relationship. The love between spouses can be much stronger than between parents and children. That is why they leave their parents. Marriage establishes a covenant relationship between two people where they plan their whole lives together. They may plan to have children together, work together, retire together and grow old together. The only way that a couple can accomplish this is if they love one another unconditionally, no conditions. It cannot be I will love you as long as you take care of me, or I will love you as long as you are kind to me, or I will love you as long as I am happy. It is I will love you and work things out regardless of what happens because of the covenant I made with you. I will love you even when I do not like you very much. I think marriage is the only relationship where this can be accomplished.

But this does not always happen in marriage. I think marriage is really hard. It is definitely worth working on; and if you have a really solid marriage, there is no better relationship in this world among human beings, but it is hard. There is some really strong language in the Gospel against divorce, and I think part of the reason for this is because of the culture at the time. Women were seen as property; and if a man put his wife out, unless there was another man to take her in, she would have difficulty surviving. When Moses established a bill of

divorce, it at least allowed a woman to remarry. I think Jesus was protecting women. Husbands made a covenant to take care of their wife and must keep that promise.

The Church has always recognized that some couples just cannot and should not be together. A civil divorce does not change your status in the Catholic Church. You can receive all of the sacraments including Communion. I think many divorced people have left the Catholic Church because they no longer felt welcome. I think this is just horrible. Divorce is extremely painful, and people have felt unwelcome in the Church when they needed it the most. There are all kinds of reasons why couples should not be together, and it is not up to us to judge. We do not know what happened between the two people, and we just need to love them when they are going through this trauma. We are going to be running our Divorce Care program again in January. The point of the program is to help divorced people heal. Get the word out to people that you know who are divorced. It is a great program.

Marriage is a vocation. Not everyone is called to be married. Some people are called to the single life. However, our culture puts great pressure on people to get married; and we need to stop doing that. Once you turn about 30 and you are not married, people tend to treat you as though there is something wrong with you. This is simply not true. Maybe the individual is called to the single life. Many single people take the energy they would have put into a marriage and channel it into other things. I discerned that I am called to the single life. Being single is not just something I endure so they would let me be a priest. My vocation has always been to help people, and that is what I have devoted most of my energy to in the priesthood and in the other jobs I had before that. I cannot tell you how many people who have told me after a divorce, I should have never been married or my ex should have never been married. We need to seriously discern if marriage is our vocation, and we need to stop judging people who are married or single. Marriage is a wonderful thing if it is your vocation, but the single life can be just as joyful and fulfilling.

Love & Peace,
Fr. Jim