

**The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Mark 10:2-16**

Sometimes you have to wonder what the good people were thinking, who put together the readings for the Church Year; like today, when we hear first about marriage, and then about the little children. You might imagine how the people working on our Lectionary thought themselves very clever to put these two motifs together; after all, they are both about the family, right?

Of course, it is not only a committee that has put these two passages together; after all, they actually follow immediately one after the other also in Holy Scripture itself. And to give some thought as to what Saint Mark had in mind by making it so, and God Himself who made him do it, well, exercises like that are usually well worth the while.

What our Lord Jesus teaches us today is to do not only with marriage and the family; it is to do with His love for sinners, that is: His salvation. And as such, it is to do with *Baptism*.

Our Lord Jesus does teach us about marriage, also, though, and what it is; and let us, by all means, begin with that.

From the beginning of creation, *God made them male and female*, our Lord Jesus says. This is what He and Holy Scripture has to say, most fundamentally, about marriage. So clearly it is just not true, when unbelievers triumphantly claim that Holy Scripture, or our Lord Jesus Himself, never says anything about the so-called "marriage" between people of the same sex. So there is that.

From the beginning of creation, *God made them male and female*, our Lord Jesus says. This is what He has to say, and Holy Scripture altogether, about marriage. *God made a woman and brought her to the man*, the Book of Creation teaches us. *And for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, it also says, and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh*. Our Lord Jesus quotes this, and adds: *Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate!* In other words, when a man leaves the household to establish a new one with his wife, and joins himself to her by a publicly binding promise, and the two come together sexually, then God Himself has joined those two together and given them to each other, and then it is right for them to live together, and only God has the right to separate them, which He does when one of them dies. This is marriage; this is how God wills for His most beloved creatures, as far as sex goes.

This world is one of sin, though, and sinners cannot be expected *not* to sin. Sin should always be anticipated, if not expected; and so, there must be rules and regulations to protect and provide for those who are sinned against. Therefore the Law God gave Moses gave the provision that if a man were to desert his duty to God, and to his wife, by sending her away, he had to give her a certificate stating that he himself had broken the marriage, not she, to protect her reputation, and her life; therefore, and not because God approves of divorce, for He does not, not at all. As we hear it today that our Lord Jesus says it: *Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.*

But why is it that God is so intent on keeping marriages together? Because His ordinance of marriage reflects His own love for Mankind, faithful and true.

*Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness, God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit said to Himself, in the beginning, or to each other. So God created Man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it."* God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit created Man to reflect His own perfect love in the created world. Therefore He made Mankind as man and woman, so that our love could be a love between two of different kinds, as is His love for us, and as ours for Him must be. And He made it so that out of the love of man and woman new life would come into the world, as all life had come into being to begin with out His love for us, to be given to His most beloved creatures. Marriage is an imagery of the love of God for us; and as such, it is also an imagery of the love Christ has for His Church.

*Husbands, love your wives, writes the holy Apostle Paul, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present the Church to Himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* And this brings us to Baptism, does it not? Well, it does. The Son of God had Himself baptised into the sin of all sinners to give Himself up to the most severe sufferings for our salvation, the righteous wrath of God against all wrong and wrongdoing, the holy hatred of His goodness against all evil, and His own judgement against all ungodliness and impurity and unbelief.

With His sufferings and death He has paid for us, in our stead and on our behalf, the price and penalty for the sin of all sinners, in full and in abundance.

And as He was baptised with us sinners, and baptised into our sin, so He has sinners baptised into Himself and His own righteousness, that is: His goodness and innocence before God, so that we shall not perish and die forever in His wrath, but rather live and be with Him forever in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. It is *with the washing of water with the Word* that He cleanses and sanctifies His Church, that is: makes her *holy and without blemish* before Him. Or as He has had His holy Apostle Peter write it: *Baptism now saves you!*

So there we are, again, at Baptism. And then we can move on to the next part of what we hear about today, our Lord Jesus and the little children.

There are those who insist that what we hear today about is nothing to do with Baptism, mostly because they do not like the idea of small children being baptised; they believe that to be fully included in the Kingdom of God, there is something one must contribute that little children are not capable of contributing; just like those who do not wish to hear what Holy Scripture teaches about marriage also pretend that it does not say what it says. For our Lord Jesus does say: *Suffer the little children to come to me, and do not hinder them; for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these!* His Kingdom, which is His salvation, bestowed in Baptism, it is exactly for those who can contribute nothing, and cannot even come to Him themselves, but have to be borne to Him, like the little children of whom we hear today. *Assuredly, I say to you, He also says, or actually: Amen, I say to you: whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a small child will by no means enter it!* Clearly, to insist that children have to become more like adults before they should have the Kingdom of God given to them, well, it is to turn things completely on their head.

*Suffer the little children to come to me, says our Lord Jesus, and do not hinder them.* Now, when He Himself came to John to be baptised by Him, John would have prevented Him, Holy Scripture says, using the same Greek word our Lord Jesus uses about not *hindering* the little children from coming to Him. And our Lord Jesus told John to *suffer* it to happen, using the same Greek word with which He told the disciples to *suffer* the little children to come to Him. Clearly, in Holy Scripture, these two words are *Baptism* words, meant to make us think of Baptism.

What binds the motifs of marriage and Baptism and little children together is this: that Baptism is God's covenant with us sinners, His sacred promise, to which He must and will be faithful, of forgiveness for sin, of rescue from eternal death and damnation, of eternal life with Him in glory.

This promise is given to us sinners, utterly and entirely unable to help ourselves, out of His goodness and mercy alone, and for no other reason whatsoever. *When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, as He has had His holy Apostle Paul write it, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, being justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* It is His grace, His gift alone, proclaimed and promised to sinners with His Word of His love and what His love has done for us, and given, really given, with His promise, to all who hear His promise and take it to heart, and this, also, He makes us to do Himself, when He richly pours out His Holy Spirit upon us, and into us, His own life and breath, so that we come alive from the death of disobedience and defiance and begin to believe in Him.

And that salvation is *His gift* alone, and not in any way for us to take for ourselves, this is what becomes absolutely clear, as we hear it today that He says it, with reference to the little children whom they bore to Him: *to such belongs the Kingdom of God.*

His salvation is His *covenant* with us sinners, established with His promise in Baptism. We are baptised *into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*, as our Lord Jesus says it at the conclusion to the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, meaning that we are *made one* with the triune God Himself, corresponding to how husband and wife are made one. He binds Himself to us by His covenant promise. And this promise He will not break, and cannot, even though we fail His love so often, and in so many ways.

His promise is His *covenant*, sacred to Him, and unbreakable. Marriage, as a covenant of love, reflects His love for us; as such, the marriage covenant must not be broken, either. In our marriages, those of us who are in one of those, we learn to appreciate the meaning of *faithful* love, like His for us, of love that gives and suffers all, and will not be broken, and its burdens and blessings.

Now, to Him, whose power works in us and can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, be glory, in the Church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, for ever and ever. *Amen.*