



Fr Paul's Homily

4th October 2009 – 27th Sunday of the Year (B)

Just a few weeks now and I shall lead a group of our young people and their helpers to the Holy Land. One of the places to which I shall take them is Dominus Flevit. It is a little church on the side of the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem and its Temple. This is a significant place because it is here that Jesus wept as he looked out over the city. "Oh" he said "how I have longed to gather your children as a hen gathers her chicks under your wings but you refused."

This is a significant place because Jesus did not weep too often. There are only two recorded times in the Gospel. We know too, from the Greek word that is used, that this was no ordinary crying because he was sad. He was giving vent to a very deep feeling which welled up from his emotions and feelings. If Jesus wept we know that it was a serious matter that sparked off such a response.



Here on the Mount of Olives the weeping happened as he looked at Jerusalem. He recalled all those times in its history when the people of Jerusalem has resisted and rejected the gift and invitation of God to be gathered together in fellowship and peace. And Jesus' own rejection was one such occasion in a long series.

But why did he weep? Because to gather human beings together in communion, fellowship, harmony, peace or reconciliation was not only his work and mission, it was that of his Father and it was the intention built into the very essence of creation in the first place. At the centre of everything is the truth that God is perfect unity and communion and we are made in that image. The unity and fellowship of God is the pattern for human living and is hard wired into every creature and every relationship. Jesus knew this as a human being and it was his experience and existence as God.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem because God's creatures refused to accept God's invitation to live in harmony and communion and in today's Gospel Jesus, while he does not weep, shows a similar depth of feeling. The Pharisees, who continually want to test Jesus, ask him whether it was against the law to divorce his wife. Divorce was allowed in Jesus time and only the man could bring it about, the woman had no rights and there was little agreement about the process. There could be serious reasons like adultery and less serious ones like the wife spoiling the man's dinner. The divorce arrangements, which in our own terms were unsatisfactory and had no regard for the rights of the woman, were an attempt to deal with the issue of marital breakdown. Jesus knew that and in what he said was not condemning those who had difficulties in their relationships. Instead the Pharisees' questions struck that very sensitive and deep chord in Jesus' heart and mind. Man and woman were created by God to become one, to live in communion with one another which was the divine purpose and reflected the very life and unity of God. So, quoting Genesis, Jesus cuts through the discussion about divorce and goes to the heart of the matter saying that those who marry become one body and that "what God has united, man must not divide."

One of our groups this week agreed that Jesus' words about marriage are hard and uncompromising. But Jesus was not passing judgement on those who have difficulty in marriage or the pain of separation. The story of Christianity is marked by the struggle to be welcoming and compassionate to those who experience such difficulty.

As we listen to Jesus today, as we are perhaps challenged and made uncomfortable by his teaching, we must not forget who he is and where he is coming from. Human beings are made for relationship because their (our) fulfilment is to share the perfect relationship of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The relationship of man and woman, united as one body in the commitment and service of marriage is created in the image of God which is the relationship Jesus has with his Father. It is a sacrament, a becoming flesh, of that communion, that harmony, that unity which is the reason for our existence.



It seems to me that there are two major responses to the Jesus' words today about marriage. The first is to accept, with him, that the relationship of man and woman which is transformed into a Sacrament in the Service of Communion is a sacred "making present" of the communion and unbreakable love of God. "What God has united, man must not divide." Marriage brings with it the invitation to the Church and every Christian to bring about that communion and gathering together in love which is the essence of the Gospel and our mission. We know that the more we can live in communion and become the communion that we eat and drink, the more effective we shall be in proclaiming the Good News.

It is clear in the Gospel passage that Jesus was not happy with the way his contemporaries supported those whose marriages had broken down and who had become separated. The second challenge to us as disciples of Jesus is to ensure that our support and care for those who are married, those who are in difficulties and those who have suffered the separation of divorce is modelled on the compassion and healing of Christ himself.

Implicit in the Lord's teaching is that his compassion and care must be extended by us to those who are not married or who cannot marry and are living a single life. There are many for whom the marriage vocation is not appropriate; they deserve to be loved as well.



Our Gospel ended with Jesus gathering the children around him. As we hold that image in our hearts and minds let us remember that the way of Christ requires us to be trusting and accepting of God's love and message which is the only way to life.