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Uniting Word & World

For Sunday, October 4, 2015

Built to Last

## This Sunday's Scripture Readings

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

<http://new.usccb.org/bible/readings/100415.cfm>

Genesis 2:18-24

Hebrews 2:9-11

Mark 10:2-16



It seems today that nothing is built to last. I remember as a child the first refrigerator housed in my childhood home. It was by no means new, and back in 1958 when the house was built and it moved in, it was already ten years old! That refrigerator still runs today. In fact, many things around the house would break in one way or another. These were rarely discarded but carefully repaired by my father or a professional who knew how. How many cell phones has the average individual already been through? Computers? Other devices?

Most things are designed and intended to be temporary. With technology advancing so quickly, things do not need to last and usually don't warrant repair when they are broken. If most that is around us in the material world has a short life expectancy, how do we learn to make something last? I even heard the other day about an [app that can assist a person with "breaking up" with someone else](#). Send a text and the relationship is over! After all, all

you have to do is find another one. Business operates like that, as attested to at [DNEWS headquarters](#). One day Skype was down, which could have spelled disaster for the company. No worries here, all you have to do is Google your way to a different communication system.

Most of what we make today from work systems to cars to appliances to buildings to clothing is made with a short life expectancy in mind. From all that is around us, where do we learn the virtue of permanence? Fewer and fewer people understand the need for something to last a long time or appreciate its value. Our readings this weekend are all about the principle of "forever" and the importance of lasting human relationships. Relationships have value and require the full investment of two people in those relationships. The stirring and feeling of a

human heart cannot be delegated to an app or treated as something that is replaceable on the road to “new and improved.”

Genesis this weekend reminds us that God values relationships and sees them as necessary for human happiness. Intimacy, as found only in a deep, lasting, and permanent relationship is something that makes human beings thrive. Our reading clearly places marriage in full view here and in particular the exultation of joy found on the lips of the man: “This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” speaks of its primacy in God’s design.

Intimacy is so incredibly important. Without it, we suffer. Even Jesus according to our second reading from Hebrews established an intimacy with God’s children. Hebrews reminds us that “he is not ashamed to call them ‘brothers.’” Intimacy is built into the system and is intended to be permanent, not disposable. From the beginning, human beings were intended to nurture an intimate relationship with God, one another, creation, and in particular with their spouse. These are sacred relationships that get at the heart of not only how God reveals himself to his people but where he can be found and embraced.

The Gospel from Mark this week does not mince words either and makes very clear that Jesus has other ideas in mind than that which happened with Moses and the bill of divorce and dismissal of a wife. Jesus sees these bonds not in contractual terms but in sacred terms. What God has joined together ought to be nurtured, treasured, and celebrated! If we do not share our lives with another, our lives are incomplete.

Now, given the teaching we hear in this weekend’s Gospel, it has to be tempered with the fullness of the teaching on marriage found in the Christian Scriptures. Hence the reason the Catholic Church has a developed teaching on divorce and an annulment process in place and an understanding that there are some circumstances that simply nullify a marriage. At the basis of all of Jesus’ teaching is mercy and compassion. We are called to see all things with mercy and compassion. Life is rarely black and white. And we cannot always understand with full consent and freedom all of the variables that will impact behavior and our ability to sustain a commitment. That being said, we must understand that God desires people to live in marriages that are nourishing, free, intimate, and mutually supportive. He does not expect anyone to endure a situation of abuse, neglect, or one where heavy burdens must be carried.

The psalm this week beckons us to “eat the fruit of your handiwork.” Our marriages, our relationships, must bear fruit. In order to be true and real they must be life giving, not life taking! Relationships that are most sacred and truly intimate, especially that of husband and wife, are called to model themselves after the very relationship Christ has with the church. Relationships, especially marriage, require an incredible amount of self-investment, time, commitment, and sacrifice. Given what is required to nurture and sustain them and the personal investment involved, they cannot be easily dispensed with and exchanged for another when it no longer suits us or appeals to us as it once did. Marriages are not contracts but sacred encounters and sacred bonds.

Lastly, it needs to be said that most of the people I have encountered in my years of ministry who have found themselves in divorce did not make that choice easily or with disregard for the permanent intent of their marriage vows. In most cases, divorce is a grueling experience that is encountered with tremendous pain, heartache, fear, anxiety, and feelings of true and genuine loss. God understands this struggle and does not look with disdain upon the person who finds him or herself in this place. Those who have struggled with this type of loss can find hope and comfort in the very passion of Christ himself.

“Blessed are you who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways!” Jesus always blessed children and encouraged everyone to develop a childlike wonder and innocence. The wonder, awe, trust, and self-abandon that come with such a grace would serve us well as we live in and through all of our relationships, especially the sacred bond of marriage. The younger generation does not understand the purpose and significance of maintaining a working old refrigerator nor the point of taking the time to repair something that is broken. These practical, everyday activities taught us life lessons that are only learned by example. With the past viewed as archaic, irrelevant, and antiquated by many, what then is life in our contemporary disposable culture teaching us?

Rev. Mark S. Suslenko

## PRAYER

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O God our Father,  
in Jesus you call all Christian families and homes  
to be signs of living faith.  
By the light of the Holy Spirit,  
lead us to be thankful for the gift of faith,  
and by that gift  
may we grow in our relationship with Jesus, your Son,  
and be confident witnesses to Christian hope and joy  
to all we meet.  
In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

—*A Family Prayer for the Year of Faith*, © USCCB.

## NOTICES

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### RESPECT LIFE MONTH

October is Respect Life Month, and the first Sunday of October is Respect Life Sunday. The USCCB has several resources available to encourage special events and activities throughout October. View the materials at <http://usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/respect-life-program/index.cfm>.

### WORLD MISSION SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2015

Many dioceses will take up a collection to support the Society for the Propagation of the Faith the weekend of October 18, 2015. LPi customers will find resources to promote this collection on Art & Media Portal. You can also find the materials resources at: [www.onefamilyinmission.org/society-propfaith/i-am-a-missionary.html](http://www.onefamilyinmission.org/society-propfaith/i-am-a-missionary.html).

### PARISH LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE, October 14-16, Phoenix

The Diocese of Phoenix is hosting its 2015 Parish Leadership Conference from October 14–16 at St. Paul Parish in Phoenix, Arizona, with keynote speaker Sherry Weddell, author of *Forming Intentional Disciples*. Be sure to visit LPi at our booth. For more information and to register, visit <http://www.diocesephoenix.org/stewardship-day.php>.

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