

## *Ordinary Time 27B 2015*

### *In the Beginning*

Last week was an extraordinary week during which Pope Francis strengthened, confirmed, and challenged us to live our Catholic faith with the hope and trust that only the gospel can give us. In Philadelphia, on the final leg of his journey, people from all over the world assembled for the World Conference on the Family, and Pope Francis took that occasion to speak about the importance of marriage.

Pope Francis reminded us that every family is the church in miniature, and every sacramental marriage is the image and reflection of the marriage between Christ and his church. And so, when marriage and family are strong, the community of the church is strong. When faith is strong within the family, the church is strong. When husband and wives live in love and fidelity with each other, they witness to the unselfish love of Christ for his church, and the deep love of the church for Christ.

In today's first reading, the Book of Genesis says that a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife. The two of them become one flesh; for God made man and woman for each other, to support and strengthen one another. And so man and woman find the fullness and completion of themselves in each other. This is why Jesus says, "They are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate."

But divorce does happen. Indeed, there is probably not a person in this congregation whose extended family has not been affected by divorce in some way. When divorce occurs, it shatters our hopes and promises. When a divorce occurs, everyone is saddened and hurt. That is why we must support marriage and

family life. That is why we must care for those who have suffered the trauma of divorce.

First, we must support those who are married at every stage of their married life, whether they are newlyweds or have been married for forty or fifty years. A sacramental marriage is an exalted vocation because it witnesses to the selfless love between Christ and the church. Every married couple is a missionary couple that proclaims the gospel by their married love for each other.

Second, when divorce does happen, it is not our place to accuse and condemn but to heal and support those who have been traumatized by it. Pope Francis reminds us that the divorced can and should participate in the life of the church. With our help, they can find the strength and support they need in their time of trial.

Although we are living in a period of extraordinary challenges for marriage and the family, there is no need to be fearful or anxious or discouraged. For the joy of the gospel reminds us that marriage belongs to God's plan for our salvation, that married life provides a powerful witness to Christ's love for his church, and that the family is the most essential building block of Christ's church. With God's help and the grace of Christ, marriage and family life will continue to flourish.