

**Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B**  
**October 4, 2009**

**Readings: Genesis 2:18-24; Hebrews 2:9-11; Mark 10:2-16**

**Let Jesus' Spirit Soften your Heart**

In our gospel passage we see the Pharisees trying to trick Jesus. They try to get Him to speak against the Law of Moses. They try to get Him to say that Moses was wrong for permitting husbands to write a bill of divorce. But Jesus doesn't go there. He goes back instead to the first book of the Law which is Genesis, a book attributed to Moses, and reminds the people and the Pharisees of what God's intention was from the beginning. He cites the passage that states: ***"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."*** And then goes on to say that ***"what God has joined together, no human being must separate."***

Jesus affirms that marriage is permanent; always has been, always will be. And Jesus says that Moses only allowed men to write a bill of divorce because of the hardness of their hearts. Because of their weakness, they were unable to live up to the standards established by God. But Jesus is about to change that. Jesus will die for our salvation. He will send His Spirit to strengthen us. He will provide us with the sacrament of Baptism by which we have the stain of original sin removed and by which we receive the Holy Spirit to give us strength to do God's will. He is establishing the sacrament of Marriage by which we are strengthened to grow in unity. Jesus came to soften our hardened hearts.

In the Old Testament, God speaks through the prophet Ezekiel and says: ***"I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts."*** (Ezek. 36:26) And that is what Jesus does for us. We are called not to let our hearts be hardened like those who lived in the times before Christ. We have received the Spirit and graces that they never received, and now Jesus expects us to live up to God's standard. The sacrament of Marriage is very important for giving couples the strength to persevere in the rough times in a marriage. Without God's constant presence in a marriage, without the Holy Spirit's assistance, a life-long marriage is very difficult. We cannot do it on our own.

Jesus addresses the issue of marriage in the gospel passage this morning, but concerns about having a hardened heart extend to all aspects of our lives as Christians. Our human condition is such that we have a tendency for our hearts to harden if we do not take advantage of the graces and gifts that the Holy Spirit offers us. It is difficult for us to do the right thing without God's constant presence and help in our lives. We need to work to keep our hearts soft and natural so that we don't suffer from spiritual hardening of our arteries. And we do this by participating in the sacraments. We attend Mass regularly and receive Holy Communion. And we go to confession regularly.

Going to confession provides us with a spiritual cleansing, but it does much more. It sends us off with the good intention to remain clean. But those intentions can be quickly forgotten. I read in the book *Rediscovering Catholicism*, by Matthew Kelly, an analogy that compares going to confession to having your car washed. ***"If you wash your car every couple of weeks, you tend to take very good care of it. You don't throw food around in it, and if you see a puddle in the middle of the road you go around it. But***

*after a few weeks without a wash, it gets messy on the inside and dirty on the outside, and you become less careful with it. You just throw another piece of trash in the back seat because there is already so much that you won't notice the extra piece. Your soul is the same. You go to Reconciliation and it becomes clean and sparkling. But after a few weeks, the little sins begin to pile up, and before you know it, a big sin doesn't look so bad on top of a pile of small sins. And once you add the big one to the pile, you figure you've made a mess already so you might as well really make a mess. Little by little, you begin to lose your sense of sin."*

Receive the sacraments regularly; Holy Communion at least once a week and Confession once a month. This is not a requirement of the Church, but I assure you that it will give you graces that will keep your heart soft and natural. Keep your heart from becoming hard and you will gain strength to follow God's will for you.

In closing, I would like to share a story I received in an email the other day, you know one of those that has been forwarded many times. I usually just delete them, but I thought this one was appropriate for today. It was entitled *Happy Fall* and stated: "***A woman was asked by a coworker, 'What is it like to be a Christian?' The coworker replied, 'It is like being a pumpkin. God picks you from the patch, brings you in, and washes all the dirt off of you. Then He cuts off the top and scoops out all the yucky stuff. He removes the seeds of doubt, hate, and greed. Then He carves you a new smiling face and puts His light inside of you to shine for all the world to see.'***" Are you willing to let God change you from a pumpkin to a jack-o-lantern.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**