

Homily: 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday: Cycle A: 2017: Sir 15: 15-20; Ps. 19; 1 Cor: 6-10; Mt 5: 17-37

“Jesus’s real teaching on Marriage”

1. **Jesus once said *the path to Heaven is narrow and the path to Hell is wide*** - not what we human beings want to hear! Today in the Gospel Jesus gives us some of His teachings that caused some of his followers to fall away - then and now. The question for us is as Jesus put it to St. Peter later in the Gospel account (Jn 6:67): ***Are you going to leave me too?*** But first let’s look briefly at the readings before the Gospel today which puts Jesus’s teaching in the proper context. The first reading from Sirach tells us, “*If you **choose**, you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live. Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he **chooses** shall be given to him. God understands man’s every deed; to none does He give license to sin.* The psalmist then tells us: *Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord! And instruct me, O Lord, in the way of your statues, that I may exactly observe them. Give me discernment, that I may observe your law and keep it with all my heart.* Finally St. Paul says, “*We speak a wisdom to those who are **mature**, not a wisdom of this age. And if we embrace it and live it we will experience happiness beyond imagining, for truly, **Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, and it has not entered the human heart what God has prepared for those who love Him.*** The Holy Spirit has revealed all this - so this leads to **Jesus’s hard teachings** today- they only make sense in light of our eternal destiny and that the path to life is narrow. **Jesus reminds us that we can’t just pick and choose among His teachings, but must embrace them all - even the tough ones.** *Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill. Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of Heaven and unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*
2. **On divorce and re-marriage:** *It was also said, whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce, but I say to you, whoever divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.* The qualification of “unless it was unlawful” deals with marrying someone who was too close of a

blood relative. **Wow this is a teaching the modern world has a tough time with.** In fact with the exception of the Catholic Church and to some degree the Orthodox Church the rest of the Christian Churches basically ignore this teaching of Jesus. This clear teaching of Jesus is the reason why the Catholic Church says if we divorce and re-marry without an annulment we are not allowed to receive the Sacraments until our situation is resolved. First off a pastoral note: *we should pray for everybody who is in difficult situations and I as a priest try to help the best I can - but sometimes my hands are tied since we are all bound by the teachings of Jesus.* These marriage issues are probably the main reason people fall away from the Catholic Church and it breaks my heart as a pastor, but we are sometimes limited in what we can do since Jesus is SO CLEAR on this matter. *Even if someone at present cannot receive the Sacraments because of their marriage situation, one should still come to Mass and participate in the prayers since there are so many graces God gives to one who is making the effort despite some obstacles and one can make **a spiritual communion**.* We all know people in these situations - please try to help them. One clarification that Catholics still misunderstand - if you are divorced but not intimately involved with another person you are free to receive the Sacraments. It is just like a single person - as long as you are living a chaste life you can receive Holy Communion. **This is also why if you are divorced you are playing with fire if you start dating another person before you receive an annulment - since until you do, you are still married in the eyes of God and the Church, and no annulment is guaranteed.** Is it a good idea to go to Confession after a divorce is finalized? Yes to receive the healing graces there since divorce is always painful, and whatever happened it must be given to the Lord - regardless of whose fault the divorce was: one or both parties.

3. **What about annulments?** Is this the Catholic form of divorce? No because an annulment says because of some serious defect based on serious investigation and sworn witness testimony there was never really a sacramental marriage bond to begin with - it deals with the beginning of the marriage when you took your vows before God: deception, inability to make a permanent commitment, grave immaturity, not being open to having children or putting a firm limit on how many children would be

born to the union instead of being open to God's will; drug or alcohol problems from the very start of the marriage, other serious psychological problems, not willing to remain faithful for life, etc. **Do the children become illegitimate?** No because a declaration of nullity doesn't mean a marriage did not occur - the civil effects are all still there, including obligations to offspring, alimony and visitation - it is just that it didn't meet the sacramental marriage criteria of the Faith upon investigation. **Do you have to pay a lot of money to get one?** In our diocese it is free. **Do non-Catholics need one?** If they want to marry a Catholic. An annulment is a decision of the Catholic Church which was given the power by Jesus himself to "bind and loose", to decree based on concrete evidence, hence the need for at least 3 witnesses to verify what the annulment petitioner is saying, that a marriage did not meet the requirements of a sacramental union. **Some will say well I don't believe in annulments.** Well we can't be "more Catholic" than the Church. And annulments have always been issued by the Church; they are just more common today because sadly there are more broken marriages today than ever in history. If you are divorced, or have taken the step on getting re-married civilly and as a result currently cannot receive the Sacraments, unless you are willing to live as brother and sister, please contact me so that I can try to help you, and see if there are grounds for an annulment. Yes, it is painful to re-visit the past, but it is also good to bring closure to it and healing in God, especially if one has been away from the Sacraments because of a marriage situation. The last word I want to mention on this is **for Catholics** who were married and now are divorced or re-married to someone else. If the first marriage was never blessed by the Catholic Church then it may be a very easy process of getting things right. This is called **a lack of canonical form case** and what that means in practical language is: *the marriage was never recognized by the Catholic Church because Catholics are bound by canon law to have a priest or deacon bless their marriage.* If that didn't happen, then by a sworn statement and two witnesses and some documentary proof, the Church can officially say it didn't meet the criteria of sacramental marriage and so one would be free to be married in the Catholic Church again. It is a much shorter process than an annulment because it is a clear cut case based on documentary evidence. Also what about **the simple form of annulment** decreed by Pope Francis? God bless you.