

Lesson 19. . . Marriage, Divorce, and the Consecrated Life
Gospel of Matthew



Notes From the Podium
By Fr. Matthew Kauth

These notes are intended to augment your own reading and study of the lesson. Please use as an aid to help document the main message of the lecture.

Matthew 19:1-30

I. The Image of Childhood

- A. Recall from chapter 18 that our Lord put the child at the epicenter of all that is large.
- B. That great oxymoron, to be small is to be large, to be humble is to be great.

II. “Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee...”

- A. What is unnoticed and sad about this is that our Lord moves away from Galilee and will not be back until after He has died and risen.
- B. Galilee was the place our Lord spent the majority of his time, labors, and miracles and teachings, and now He is leaving.

III. “And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?”

- A. Now there were two schools of thought as your text describes.
 - 1. The strict school of Shammai, in which you could only divorce your wife in the case of “pornea”, often translated as unchastity or unlawful marriage.
 - 2. The very loose school of Hillel, in which you could divorce your wife for just about any reason.
 - 3. Our Lord appears to side with the school of Shammai but not just with the law.
- B. “Have you not read that He who made them from the beginning made them male and female?”
 - 1. The phrase “from the beginning” should call to our minds:
 - a. The first words of Genesis
 - b. That our Lord has not fallen even in his human nature and does not share in original sin
 - c. He alone, both as God and as unfallen man can take us over the boundary of original sin back into that original garden.
 - d. He alone can take us back to the state of original innocence, original purity, original solitude and ultimately communion with the Father.
 - 2. “...made them male and female”
 - a. Gender is built into the flesh and is complementary.
 - b. John Paul II said that this complementarity creates a nuptial meaning in the body,
 - i. The male body says to the female body, I don’t belong to myself, I belong to you and vice versa.



Notes From the Podium (cont)

- ii. The persons are equal but they are not the same; they are complementary.
 - c. This union of love is the very groundwork of what we call marriage, and God created man to be this way.
 3. Ultimately, this is the image of the triune Persons.
 - a. The Father gives Himself to the Son.
 - b. The Son receives all that He is from the Father.
 - c. The Son then returns Himself to the Father in the love of the Holy Spirit.
 4. With a man and a woman, there is also the gift of one to the other.
 - a. The man found nothing in creation to which he could give himself.
 - i. Although man could know all things of creation none could receive him, because none could know him.
 - ii. God put him to sleep and takes from him a rib and by doing so creates someone who is of man's own flesh and bones, someone that also has life breathed into her by God.
 - iii. The Father brings this woman to the man in the image of a wedding and the Father gives away his daughter,
 - b. The man says "at last" (you can hear the burden of time) "this one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, this one shall be called woman".
 - c. It is her body that tells him that she is his complement, she need not say anything
 5. The Rib: Sacrifice and Path
 - a. Our Lord took something from man to build the woman and give her life.
 - b. Our Lord would follow this same path to give life to His bride, the Church, the path of the rib.
 - c. This is the very foundation of the ultimate relationship between our Lord and His Church.
 - i. Our Lord, the new Adam, will give not simply a rib, but his life.
 - ii. The spear would pass just alongside that rib and pierce His heart.
 - iii. His blood would flow from His most sacred heart and give life to His woman, His bride, His Church.
 6. This is the image that was created from the beginning
 - a. Sacramental Christian marriage is indissoluble.
 - b. It is raised up to the level of a sacrament, not just something natural.
 - i. As all sacraments are, it becomes an efficacious sign of a reality.
 - ii. A sign not simply of the union between man and wife but the union between Christ and His Church.
 - c. Therefore it is always three that get married and that indissolubility is created by Christ.
 - i. It is not based upon the fidelity, goodness or even the love of the spouses,
 - ii. Human love is a very fickle thing.
 - iii. The marital bond is not based on human love, but rather on Christ's love for His bride, the Church.
 - d. Regeneration takes place in the sacraments.



Notes From the Podium (cont)

- i. The Church always receives her Spouse and gives herself back to Him.
 - ii. In this exchange life is constantly created in new sons and daughters.
- C. “They are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”
 1. Not *who* God has joined but *what* He has joined; He has created a completely new and different reality.
 2. Recall the teaching about being “yoked” to Christ. In this case He is yoking two persons together in Himself in such a way that you *can’t* tear them apart.
 - a. Not that you *shouldn’t* break apart what has been joined together but that you *can’t* break it apart, it is impossible.
 - b. If you attempt to separate this *one* reality that He created all you will have left is two dead halves.
 - c. Christ himself created it and He alone has the power to destroy it
 - d. He will not destroy it because it is an image of His love for the Church and He is ever faithful.
- D. “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce...?”
 1. “*Why then*” indicates that they understood Him to mean that marriage cannot be destroyed.
 2. He said to them, “For your hardness of heart,”
 - a. “sclerocardia” - your hardness of heart.
 - b. A state where nothing can enter you and nothing can leave.
 3. “Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning”(the way God made it), “it was not so.”
 - a. This had been the situation due to man’s sinfulness (hardness of heart).
 - b. But, through Christ all things were to be made new by grace and it would be as it was intended “from the beginning” once again.
- E. “Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity (pornea), and marries another commits adultery.”
 1. The word “pornea” means unchastity *or* unlawfulness.
 2. This word is used differently in different passages but of all the texts that speak of marriage, this is the only place it is used.
 - a. Matthew was referring here to the law of Shammai.
 - b. The case where someone married someone *unlawfully*, so that there is not a valid marriage.
 3. This isn’t an exception clause saying that we may divorce if our spouse is unfaithful rather that no valid marriage ever existed.
 - a. If there is no marriage to begin with then nothing is destroyed by a separation.
 - b. Catholics call this an annulment – a determination that there was no valid marriage from the beginning because of some impediment to establishing a covenant of marriage.
- F. “The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.”
 1. They’re not saying that it will be impossible rather just that it is too difficult and so maybe it’s just better never to get married.



Notes From the Podium (cont)

2. In this chapter we frequently see the disciples acknowledge their human weakness with humility.
 3. Christ responds by saying something that would not make sense outside of this new reality that He is creating.
 - a. The union of Christ and His bride, the Church, is the fulfillment of the sacrament of marriage.
 - b. Our Lord's marriage to His Church is no sign, it is the reality.
- G. "Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given."
1. "... He, who is able to receive this, let him receive it."
 2. The word that is used here for "receive" has been seen before:
 - a. It is used to describe the six stone water jars, to show that they had a capacity for lots and lots of water.
 - b. It is used by Paul in asking the Corinthians to make room in their hearts.
 - c. It's used at the end of St. John's Gospel to say, if everything is written down that our Lord had said and done, the whole word could not *contain* it.
 3. Christ is going to give a gift and let those created with the capacity receive it.
 - a. Father Kauth shares a personal example from his visits to the Carmel of St. Joseph in Spain. (The Carmel made by St. Teresa of Avila).
 - i. Father met a nun while visiting the Carmel and asked her to pray for his priestly vocation.
 - ii. Several years later he returned and again talked with the same nun.
 - iii. When he asked if she remembered him, she responded by saying, "Of course I remember you Father, the Carmelite's heart is large enough to hold all of those things." (she even called him by name and he had not given it to her)
 - b. That kind of infinite capacity is created to receive a gift.
 4. It is not sufficient to simply be unmarried; one consecrates themselves only if Christ has opened up their capacity and poured Himself in.
 - a. One must have a great "capacity" to contain the living God.
 - b. First there must be an emptiness created, such that one is made for the reception of Him, like that Carmelite's heart.
- IV. "Then children were brought to Him that he might lay his hands on them and pray."
- A. Priests will lay their hands on the victims, the lambs that were to be sacrificed because they were going to be offered to God.
 - B. The people are bringing their children to Jesus, the High Priest, to have Him lay His hands on them as if to say they are consecrated to the Lord.
 1. The children are offered unto Him.
 2. This follows right after that passage about celibacy.
 3. To be childlike is to want to receive everything from the Father.
 4. The child is like the Son; for the Son Himself receives all that He is from the Father.
 - C. The celibate receives everything that he has.



Notes From the Podium (cont)

1. The priests and the Levites had no inheritance (Psalm 16 speaks of Christ alone being the inheritance).
2. Of all the tribes, the Levites were given no land because God alone was their inheritance, they were consecrated unto Him.
- D. “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”
 1. We saw this promise before in the Beatitudes.
 2. It was promised to those who are poor in spirit, who long for Him. This is the aspect of childhood/Sonship that is desirable.
- V. “Good teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?”
 - A. He knows he’s kept the commandments but, what else is necessary?
 - B. He calls Jesus “good teacher” - Our Lord responds, “Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good.” (An inside joke because only God is good and of course He is God.)
 - C. “If you would enter life...”
 1. He does not say *if you would fulfill life* or *if you would come to the end of life* but just to enter it.
 2. Recall our discussion of the beatitudes: to keep the commandments was only the beginning of the road to enter into eternal life.
 3. Jesus said to him, “If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”
 4. “All these I have observed; what do I still lack?”
 - a. A novice mistress once said to St. Therese of Liseux, “I have so many virtues to acquire, so many things that I must obtain”. St. Therese responded, “my dear you have so many things to lose.”
 - b. “What do I still lack?” he asked Jesus.
 - i. He was all too full, if he wanted to go all the way, then he was going to have to empty himself.
 - ii. Christ can’t exist where there are some many other competing desires. They must all be emptied out.
 5. Jesus says to him, “If you would be perfect...”
 - a. “teleios”- Greek word literally meaning mature or complete.
 - b. To be perfect you must come to the end, find the very purpose of your existence, reach not simply the beginning of life, but get to the very end.
 6. In another Gospel it says our Lord “looked at him with love”.
 - a. He does this to draw him out, for what He’s going to ask of him cannot be done by himself.
 - b. Yet our Lord never gives us so much grace that it overwhelms us, never does it contradict human liberty/freedom.
 - i. Freedom is the means to be able to love.
 - ii. He gives just sufficient grace to say “yes”.
 - iii. Then after we say yes, He floods us with His life, with His grace because then we have emptied ourselves.
 - iv. Every yes to Him is a self-emptying. *Let Your will be done and not mine.*



Notes From the Podium (cont)

7. “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess ... and come, follow me.”
 - a. It’s not sufficient just to empty yourself.
 - b. Emptying yourself of worldly goods is simply a way to assist you to follow him unencumbered.
 - c. Following Him is the point, unencumbered by dueling desires.
 - d. To have one fundamental passion for the Savior that orders all of your other desires, that’s the point.
- D. Then there is a silence that descends as Jesus waits to see what the man will say.
 1. All of the desires that the man has are like little tethers, holding him bound.
 - a. None of them by themselves is perhaps sufficient to bind him.
 - b. He is sad because he wants our Lord and yet he has not the strength to divest himself of his other loves.
 2. Everything in Catholicism is a matter of loving the greater, of always trading in our lesser loves for a greater one.
 3. There is always that little moment of fear and indecision where we think: *yes but if I lose this I’ll have nothing.*
 - a. But it’s only for such a short space of time, the time it takes to let go of the one thing and grasp another.
 - b. It is in that interval where all of man’s human freedom is played out.
 - c. And the man held on to what he had before and he went away sad, for he had great possessions.
- E. “Truly, I say to you, it will be harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”
 1. More of our Lord’s hyperbole.
 2. It’s not simply difficult but ultimately impossible.
 - a. That camel would have to shrink such that the aperture of the needle’s eye becomes larger than the camel.
 - b. For us this means that we must become small such that we are able to walk right through.
- F. “Who then can be saved?”
 1. Again the disciples come up against their human limitations.
 2. Jesus responds, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Translation: camels and needles don’t go together, but with the Son of God making of you a son, that aperture will become so large that you’ll walk right in with me.)
 3. “Then Peter said in reply, ‘Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?’”
 - a. It is a very good thing and to want God and His kingdom in that order.
 - b. Peter is saying that he and the disciples have done what Jesus has just told the rich man to do.
 - i. They have left everything and now are left with only Jesus.
 - ii. That’s the very kind of dependence our Lord wants to create.
 - iii. The reality is that in having Him, you have everything.



Notes From the Podium (cont)

4. “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on His glorious throne, ... every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many that are first will be last, and the last first.”