

God unites; man separates. One of these is life; the other is death. Your body and soul are joined together. This is life. God did this. He is the One who gives life. He brought you, body and soul, together in your mother's womb.

Death is separation. When this happens, the body is returned to the ground, and the soul, of the Christian, returns to God. Death is not from God, but from man. God unites; man separates. Because of man's sin against God, yes, our sin, the separation of death is, sadly, a part of life.

The Pharisees here in Mark 10 test Jesus by asking: "*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?*" Divorce is death, the death of a marriage. It is the separation of a husband and wife. But God did not create death. He is not the God of death, but the God of life. "*From the beginning,*" answers Jesus, "*... God made them male and female.*" He brought the woman to the man, creating marriage. And through this blessed union bringing life into the world through the bearing of children.

The Pharisees question, "Is divorce lawful?" can be answered: Yes, sure it is. There are lawful ways to divorce a spouse. In Deuteronomy 24 Moses wrote down one such way. Today in our country, divorce is a legal process, even a no-fault process. According to the law, divorce is lawful.

Yet this does not move divorce into the arena of life. Divorce remains in the arena of death, for it is not union, but separation.

We can compare it to other types of separation. Would you intentionally separate your hand from your body? You could find a way to do it lawfully. But why would you? To separate the hand from the body is death, the death of the hand, and possibly of the body as well. And death always causes pain and sorrow.

If your hand becomes infected, rather than immediately cutting it off from your body, would you not first seek help? Far better to bring healing to the hand and body than to cut off the hand from the body. (Do you see how this compares to marriage and divorce?) And yet, there are times when there is no possibility of healing, and keeping the hand and the body together. There is already death at work – gangrene. And to prevent further death and decay, separation is the lesser of two evils.

And so, also with divorce. There are times when separation cannot be avoided, for death is already at work in the marriage, and it cannot be brought back to life, and divorce becomes the lesser of two evils.

But this, says Jesus, is "*because of your hardness of heart.*" Whose heart? Not just husbands and wives who separate and divorce. All of us. We all have hardness within our hearts. Call it sin. Call it rebelliousness against God. It is a hardness and stubbornness that chooses its own selfish way of death over life.

But God is not the God of death. He is the God of life, even when we choose death. Not only did He give you life in your mother's womb by uniting your body and soul, He gave you life, real life with Him, by uniting you to Jesus in Holy Baptism. This is a marriage! Yes, marriage, when you were grafted into Christ in your baptism. A marriage that is not separated by sin and death, nor by the hardness of our hearts. Indeed, writes St. Paul: "*(Nothing) will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

"Is divorce lawful?" ask the Pharisees of Jesus. From the standpoint of man, yes, it is. But not from the standpoint of God. Why not? Is it because He is a God who refuses to budge and allow a husband and wife to divorce even when their marriage is dead and decaying? Even when there has been adultery?

Friends, it is because He is a God who refuses to separate Himself from you and me even when we commit spiritual adultery against Him. Your Lord will not divorce Himself from you even when you and I selfishly go our own way apart from Him. Even when we fall into the most wicked and rebellious sins against Him, He simply will not cut you off and separate you, divorce you, from His love and mercy.

Let me give you proof. "*Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother,*" we read here, "*and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*" These words do not merely refer to a husband and wife. We see them most clearly at the cross as Jesus gives Himself up to death for the sake of His Bride. His Heavenly Father already left Him, forsaking His beloved Son. "*My God, My God,*" Jesus cried, "*Why have You forsaken Me!*" And then, in St. John chapter 19, we see Jesus leaving His mother, Mary, giving her to His disciple, the Apostle John: "*Woman, behold, your son!*" And to John: "*Behold, your mother!*" On the cross Jesus left Father and mother to hold fast to you, His Bride, becoming one flesh with you; united, joined to you.

It was God who did this. And what "*God has joined together, let not man separate.*" There is nothing in your sinful past that can separate you from Jesus. It's all forgiven, every bit of it. You are "one flesh" with Jesus, united to Him in your baptism. Therefore, Jesus takes what is yours, and He gives you what is His. He takes your sins, and He gives you His innocence. He takes your punishment, and He gives you a place in heaven.

Every marriage, every joining together of a husband and wife is a beautiful reminder of this. Every marriage points to what we have with Jesus; to our "one flesh" union with Him. Is this not a wonderful reason why God desires to protect every marriage? And why Jesus says: "*What God has joined together, let not man separate*"?

Friends, whatever you and I have separated, choosing death over life, does not change God. He is and remains the God of life. He chooses life for us. He unites even though we separate. Be assured, therefore, be absolutely assured that He will not choose to separate Himself from you. He will never divorce you. That word is not in His vocabulary. What you have in your baptismal marriage with Jesus is forever. He will always hold fast to you, His forgiven Bride. Amen.