

## **Homily For Friday of the 19th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II**

### **St Peter's 8:30am Mass - August 16, 2024**

**Ezekiel 16:115** "Because of my covenant with you, you will never again open your mouth in shame ."

**Isaiah:2-6** "Surely God is my salvation. I will trust and will not be afraid."

**Matthew 19:3-12** "It was because you were hard hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce."

### **The Covenant Remains**

#### **Introduction**

A covenant and a contract are two very different things. A contract is a legal arrangement for the mutual benefit of the parties involved. That contract is torn up when one or both parties are no longer benefitting. It is signatures on paper. A covenant is a relationship bond, where the guarantee is the persons themselves.

Even before Israel, the peoples of the ancient Middle East had an understanding of what it means to be in a covenant relationship. Anthropologists describe ancient marriage ceremonies. The families of a bride and groom would come together and begin by slaughtering an ox or sheep. They would cut the animal lengthwise, lay the halves down. The leaders of the families would then walk through the blood between the halves, both proclaiming as they did, that if their son or daughter broke the marriage covenant, they would wish that what happened to the animal would happen to them also. So they made themselves the guarantee of the marriage bond.

There is in us, human beings created in the image and likeness of God, a desire to commit ourselves like this. Of course, human weakness does not always make that ideal possible. That is why on this Friday, as on all Fridays, we look at the crucified Christ, whose own blood is the guarantee of the covenant that God makes with his people from the beginning.

#### **Ezekiel**

In the passage from Ezekiel, there is an extended image of blood and nakedness so graphic that it was often censored for young people. It describes the pathetic

state in which humans frequently find ourselves in relationship to God. But because God is perfectly faithful to the covenant he has entered into with humanity, forgiveness is always offered and is always possible.

## **Matthew**

So this is the context for the question of divorce, a test to Jesus from the Pharisees. They want to know if he will follow the permission for divorce that Moses allowed. Jesus responds with the true covenant meaning of marriage. It is to be a reflection or an echo of God by underlining its indissolubility.

The more liberal tradition was divorce for any cause. The conservative position was only for adultery. Jesus doesn't go with either but instead explains the meaning of covenant. The response of the disciples is that surely this kind of commitment is too hard. But his response is that failure, even when it is something difficult, is because of hardness of heart. The truth is that we will always be unfaithful, but God will always take us back. That is the wording of the covenant logic.

Saint John Paul II said about Jesus' answer to the Pharisees that Christ was putting forward the total vision of man, without which no adequate answer can be given to questions connected with marriage.

## **Call to Conversion**

How many ways today do we seek exceptions from covenant relationship? First of all, we need to understand our identity: "From the beginning the Creator made them male and female." Jesus teaches that there is great meaning to our masculinity and femininity in God's plan. To ignore it is to ignore who we are. Second, "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife." God's plan is not that a man leave his parents and cling to whomever he wishes, but to a wife. Third: "The two shall become one flesh." This is more than the marital act itself but is a participation with God in the possibility of creating new life. Finally: "What God has joined together, man must not separate." God himself has joined man and woman in marriage and whenever we try to divide what he has joined,

we do so on our own and at society's expense. Yes, this is where we find ourselves so close to the disciples who ask essentially: Why should we bother. Why should we even try when this is so difficult?

Besides contemplating the cross as the blood that saves us, we can look to great saints like St. Teresa of Avila, who gradually became aware of her own failures: "I believe we shall never learn to know ourselves except by endeavoring to know God. Beholding His greatness, we are struck by our own baseness. His purity shows our foulness, and by meditating on His humility we find how very far we are from being humble. Our understanding and will become more noble and capable of good in every way when we turn from ourselves to God. It is very injurious never to raise our minds above the mire of our own faults."

Moses recognized this problem. He was the one who mediated the covenant relationship between God and his people. He knew what a covenant is, yet he kind of allowed an escape clause. So Moses himself could not figure out how to hold marriage partners to a covenant standard. This is another example of how Jesus supersedes human interpretations. Let us on this Friday in ordinary time, join ourselves to him in the covenant of his blood, for our forgiveness.