

My Brothers and Sisters,

Both today's reading from Genesis and today's Gospel invite us to reflect on marriage. However, the reading from Genesis suggests that the meaning of marriage flows out of what it means to be human. The story suggests four profound truths about ourselves as God created us.

God said, "*It is not good for the man to be alone.*" In other words, God created us social. God created us to live in relationship, in community, with others. To be a person is to be capable of relating consciously in knowledge and love. Therefore, our four greatest needs as persons are to know and to be known, to love and to be loved. In a word, our greatest personal need is intimacy with others.

Scripture scholars tell us that the story of the creation of woman from the rib of man was a primitive attempt to explain sexual attraction. As the story went, because a rib of man was taken to create woman, man and woman are each incomplete alone and so are drawn to each other. In other words, God created us sexual. Sex and sexuality, then, are gifts from God and, therefore, are good.

The beautiful conclusion to the story gives us the meaning of marriage: "That is why a man and woman leave their father and mother and cling to each other, and the two of them become one body." In other words, if God created us social and sexual, God created marriage. In marriage, an *I* and a *you* become a *we*: two become one, one in heart, one in mind, one in affections. In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches us that God, therefore, is the binding or bonding force in marriage: "*Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate.*"

When God brought the woman to the man, he exclaimed, "*This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called 'woman,' for out of 'her man' this one has been taken.*" The final truth is that in this communion of life that is marriage, man and woman are radically equal. "*Bone of my bones*" suggests that men and women share the same strengths; "*flesh of my flesh*" suggests that they share the same weaknesses. If men and women share the same strengths and weaknesses from the beginning, God intended men and women to be radically equal. If there is any inequality between men and women, either in marriage or in society, this is a consequence of sin.

At the same time, in a society that accepts divorce, we need to recognize that Christian marriages are significantly different from other marriages. Jesus took marriage, already good and holy and beautiful, and elevated it to a sacrament, a sacred sign of his love for the Church. Since sacraments are signs that cause what they signify, the love of Christian couples for each other not only is a sign of Christ's love for the Church but also makes that love real and present in our world today.

My brothers and sisters, in today's Gospel, when people were bringing children to Jesus to be blessed, his disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he became indignant and said, "*Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*" Today is also Respect Life Sunday. A Sunday when we celebrate the meaning of marriage is the perfect day to celebrate Respect Life Sunday. Today's first reading and today's Gospel proclaim that God is the creator and, therefore, the giver of all life. Parents are co-creators with God of new human life. From the moment of conception, children are entrusted to their parents to be cherished and nurtured. Each child conceived has a unique part to play in God's plan of salvation. We never have the right to rob a child, including an unborn child, of his or her opportunity to answer God's invitation to know and to be known, to love and to be loved. It seems to me that if marriage, family, and sexuality were held more sacred, the problem of abortion would be almost non-existent.