



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Marriage in the Integral Vision of Man

The Gospels according to Matthew and Mark report the answer Christ gave to the Pharisees when they questioned him about the indissolubility of marriage. They referred to the law of Moses, which in certain cases admitted the practice of the so-called certificate of divorce. Reminding them of the first chapters of Genesis, Christ answered: "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What, therefore, God has joined together, let not man put asunder." Then, referring to their question about the law of Moses, Christ added: "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (*Mt* 19:3ff.; cf. *Mk* 12:2ff.). In his answer, Christ referred twice to the "beginning." Therefore we, too, in the course of our analyses, have tried to clarify in the deepest possible way the meaning of this "beginning." It is the first inheritance of every human being in the world, man and woman. It is the first attestation of human identity according to the revealed word, the first source of the certainty of man's vocation as a person created, in the image of God himself.

Christ's reply has a historical meaning, but not only a historical one. People of all times raise the question on the same subject. Our contemporaries also do so. But in their questions they do not refer to the law of Moses, which admitted the certificate of divorce, but to other circumstances and other laws. These questions of theirs are charged with problems, unknown to Christ's interlocutors. We know what questions concerning marriage and the family were addressed to the last Council, to Pope Paul VI, and are continually formulated in the post-conciliar period, day after day, in the most varied circumstances. They are addressed by single persons, married couples, fiances and young people. But they are also addressed by writers, journalists, politicians, economists and demographers, in a word, by contemporary culture and civilization.

I think that among the answers that Christ would give to the people of our time and to their questions, often so impatient, the one he gave to the Pharisees would still be fundamental. Answering those questions, Christ would refer above all to the "beginning." Perhaps he would do so all the more resolutely and essentially in that the interior and at the same time the cultural situation of modern man seems to be moving away from that beginning. It is assuming forms and dimensions which diverge from the biblical image of the beginning into points that are clearly more and more distant.

However, Christ would not be surprised by any of these situations, and I suppose that he would continue to refer mainly to the beginning. For this reason, Christ's answer called for an especially thorough analysis. In that answer, fundamental and elementary truths about the human being, as man and woman, were recalled. It is the answer through which we catch a glimpse of the structure of human identity in the dimensions of the mystery of creation and, at the same time, in the perspective of the mystery of redemption. Without that there is no way of constructing a theological anthropology and, in its context, a theology of the body. From this the fully Christian view of marriage and the family takes its origin. Paul VI pointed this out when, in his encyclical dedicated to the problems of marriage and procreation in its responsible meaning on the human and Christian planes, he referred to the "total vision of man" (*Humanae Vitae* 7). In the answer to the Pharisees, Christ also put forward to his interlocutors this "total vision of man," without which no adequate answer can be given to questions connected with marriage and procreation. This total vision of man must be constructed from the beginning.

This applies also to the modern mentality, just as it did, though in a different way, to Christ's interlocutors. We are children of an age in which, owing to the development of various disciplines, this total vision of man may easily be rejected and replaced by multiple partial conceptions. Dwelling on one or other aspect of the *compositum humanum*, these do not reach man's *integrum*, or they leave it outside their own field of vision. Various cultural trends then take their place. On the basis of these partial truths, these trends formulate their proposals and practical indications on human behavior and, even more often, on how to behave with "man." Man then becomes more an object of determined techniques than the responsible subject of his own action. The answer Christ gave to the Pharisees also wishes man, male and female, to be this subject. This subject decides his own actions in the light of the complete truth about himself, since it is the original truth, or the foundation of genuinely human experiences. This is the truth that Christ makes us seek from the beginning. Thus we turn to the first chapters of Genesis.

The study of these chapters, perhaps more than of others, makes us aware of the meaning and the necessity of the theology of the body. The beginning tells us relatively little about the human body, in the naturalistic and modern sense of the word. From this point of view, in our study we are at a completely pre-scientific level. We know hardly anything about the interior structures and the regularities that reign in the human organism. However, at the same time, perhaps precisely because of the antiquity of the text, the truth that is important for the total vision of man is revealed

in the most simple and full way. This truth concerns the meaning of the human body in the structure of the personal subject. Subsequently, reflection on those archaic texts enables us to extend this meaning of the whole sphere of human inter-subjectivity, especially in the perennial man-woman relationship. Thanks to that, we acquire with regard to this relationship a perspective which we must necessarily place at the basis of all modern science on human sexuality, in the bio-physiological sense. That does not mean that we must renounce this science or deprive ourselves of its results. On the contrary, it can teach us something about the education of man, in his masculinity and femininity, and about the sphere of marriage and procreation. If it is to do so, it is necessary - through all the single elements of contemporary science - always to arrive at what is fundamental and essentially personal, both in every individual, man or woman, and in their mutual relations.

It is precisely at this point that reflection on the ancient text of Genesis is irreplaceable. It is the beginning of the theology of the body. The fact that theology also considers the body should not astonish or surprise anyone who is aware of the mystery and reality of the Incarnation. Theology is that science whose subject is divinity. Through the fact that the Word of God became flesh, the body entered theology through the main door. The Incarnation and the redemption that springs from it became also the definitive source of the sacramentality of marriage, which we will deal with at greater length in due time.

The questions raised by modern man are also those of Christians - those who are preparing for the sacrament of marriage or those who are already living in marriage, which is the sacrament of the Church. These are not only the questions of science, but even more, the questions of human life. So many men and so many Christians seek the accomplishment of their vocation in marriage. So many people wish to find in it the way to salvation and holiness.

The answer Christ gave to the Pharisees, zealots of the Old Testament, is especially important for them. Those who seek the accomplishment of their own human and Christian vocation in marriage are called, first of all, to make this theology of the body, whose beginning we find in the first chapters of Genesis, the content of their life and behavior. How indispensable is a thorough knowledge of the meaning of the body, in its masculinity and femininity, along the way of this vocation! A precise awareness of the nuptial meaning of the body, of its generating meaning, is necessary. This is so since all that forms the content of the life of married couples must constantly find its full and personal dimension in life together, in behavior, in feelings! This is all the more so against the background of a civilization which remains under the pressure of a materialistic and utilitarian way of thinking and evaluating. Modern bio-physiology can supply a great deal of precise information about human sexuality. However, knowledge of the personal dignity of the human body and of sex must still be drawn from other sources. A special source is the Word of God himself, which contains the revelation of the body, going back to the beginning.

How significant it is that Christ, in the answer to all these questions, orders man to return, in a

way, to the threshold of his theological history! He orders him to put himself at the border between original innocence, happiness and the inheritance of the first fall. Does he not perhaps mean to tell him that the path along which he leads man, male and female, in the sacrament of marriage, the path of the redemption of the body, must consist in regaining this dignity. In it there is simultaneously accomplished the real meaning of the human body, its personal meaning and its meaning of communion.

For the present, let us conclude the first part of our meditations dedicated to this important subject. To give an exhaustive answer to our questions, sometimes anxious ones, on marriage - or even more precisely, on the meaning of the body-we cannot dwell only on what Christ told the Pharisees, referring to the beginning (cf. *Mt* 19:3ff.; *Mk* 10:2ff.). We must also consider all his other statements. Two of them, of an especially comprehensive character, emerge especially. The first one is from the Sermon on the Mount, on the possibilities of the human heart in relation to the lust of the body (cf. *Mt* 5:8). The second one is when Jesus referred to the future resurrection (cf. *Mt* 22:24-30; *Mk* 12:18-27; *Lk* 20:27-36).

We intend to make these two statements the subject of our following reflections.