

Dear Brothers and Sisters



‘Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?’

Years ago, my uncle Gerry decided to divorce my aunt Maggie. He drew a chalk line down the middle of the room, across the floor and up the wall, and said to Maggie “That side of the house is yours, and this is mine”.

But the parish priest was coming to celebrate a Mass in their house. At the sign of Peace, the priest waited. They sheepishly gave each other the sign of Peace, and Gerry erased the chalk line he had drawn. It was not their peace, but the Peace of Christ that was given and received. They didn’t get divorced, and went on to have eight children, and a house full of laughter.

In Jesus’ day there were two main schools of rabbinical thought regarding divorce. One held that divorce was permissible only for serious reasons, the other that divorce should be given at will.

The question is asked of Jesus by the Pharisees not because they want to be taught, but because they are seeking to trip him up in his answer. Whatever he says, he will have to side with one school or the other, thus making enemies.

Which side does he choose? Neither. He refers to Scripture, specifically the first pages of the Book of Genesis, which speak of God’s original design for the relationship between man and woman in Marriage.

The Old Testament expresses the relationship of God and his people as a marriage covenant. God is espoused to his people in a Covenant. Jesus is the incarnate fulfillment of this marriage Covenant. He is the bridegroom, betrothed to his bride, the Church.

How many times could Jesus have divorced us? Many. Individually we are sinners, and institutionally the Church has done things that are shameful to even mention. If that is not good enough reason for the Covenant to be broken, what is?

But the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, has never divorced us – individually or institutionally.

The love of God is such that there is always a possibility of repentance and reconciliation. Sin does not define who we are, it is a fall from grace, a lack of truth, the truth found in the unbreakable bond that unites the Bridegroom to the Beloved.

If God’s ways were our ways it would all be over. The Church would cease to exist, and individually we would each be standing on the wrong side of an indelible line.

But He has never divorced us. The love that unites him to his Bride is stronger than any transgression, any infidelity, any sin. It is in this love, this Peace, that we are betrothed to Him, and betrothed to one another.

May the Peace of the Lord be with you.

Fr. Sean