

**Reflection on the Gospel-27th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
(Mark 10:2-16)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

The “test” question about divorce that the Pharisees put to Jesus is very strange in a first century Jewish context, as is the reference to women divorcing their husbands. While there is no evidence that anyone in Jewish circles questioned the legality of divorce, there is plenty of evidence for lively debate concerning the grounds on which a Jewish man could divorce his wife: adultery; inferior cooking; even diminished beauty! There were various schools of thought. Jewish law, unlike Roman law, however, did not permit women to initiate divorce proceedings on any grounds at all. From the perspective of the Markan Jesus, Moses only permitted divorce as a concession to “hardness of heart”: it was not so from the beginning. The ideal, he insists, is expressed in the Garden Story of Genesis, the story of “one flesh”, of partnership, of equality and mutuality, of enduring commitment in marriage. The Hebrew word *'ezer* which is translated as “helper” in the first reading from Genesis is used in the Psalms of God’s relationship to Israel. It does not denote inferiority of women to men as is sometimes suggested.

In our times, human limitation is just as much a reality as it was in the ancient world. We strive for the ideal but fall far short of it in so many ways. When this happens in marriage, the consequences can be more far-reaching than in other aspects of our lives. The parties involved become the “little ones” whose lives are shattered and disoriented. The embrace of the community is needed in a very particular way for everyone affected by divorce. Too often, those who have experienced the trauma of divorce feel alienated from the worshipping community, and this at a time when they need the grace of God and the courage to face a different future from the one they had envisaged on their wedding day.

Though seemingly unconnected, the story about marital commitment leads immediately into a story about Jesus taking the children in his arms and blessing them, despite the disciples’ attempts to send them away. Children are important persons who are not to be excluded from the inner circle of love and compassion at any time. When parents part company, the best interests and needs of the children are sometimes forgotten. Today’s gospel seems to be calling us all to be there for one another, to support those who are struggling in their relationships and to remember the children no matter what happens.