

Softening the Heart

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time year B

Mark 10:2-16

I deliberately chose the longer gospel passage for today.

(“You’ll thank me later!”)

It is tempting to drop the second part, because it seems unrelated.

I love to excavate to find the relation; I am sure there is one.

In this conversation with the Pharisees (as in other conversations), it is quite amazing (and somewhat disturbing)

how Jesus is never content with simple answers.

This is a “**yes**” or “**no**” question that Jesus is asked.

However, He does not simply answer “**yes**” or “**no**”.

I am surprised that one of the Pharisees did not intervene:

“Just answer the question, please.”

Jesus instead refers to Moses.

Jesus invites thoughtfulness.

How kind of Jesus, for they are testing Jesus and He knows it.

He could have unveiled their deceit and “slammed” them.

(I would have!) But

- direct confrontation would have borne no fruit
- direct confrontation would have shut doors

Jesus invites thoughtfulness,

referring to that which should be familiar to them: the teaching of Moses.

Only when they persist in deceit is Jesus more directly confrontational.

They do not really wish to be thoughtful, to think, to engage in dialogue.

They wish to manipulate the law to their own end.

Jesus becomes more directly confrontational and calls them on their deceit,

and on the hardness of heart it entails.

The real issue at hand is their hardness of heart,

- which led to Moses adding a “clause” for divorce (Deuteronomy 24)
- which has led to them testing instead of welcoming Jesus

The only way to begin to soften their hearts

is to re-ascend to the Source of the love that it seems they are lacking,

to “He for whom and through whom all things exist”. (2nd reading: Hebrews 2)

From the Source, Jesus articulates God’s perspective

on the human heart and on marriage.

Jesus speaks of God as the “Joiner”
in the joining of man and woman as husband and wife.
There is a lasting bond *of divine doing*.
I deliberately say “of divine doing”.
The marriage bond, indeed all truly loving bonds
are sacred ground upon which we tread,
which does not entirely belong to us.
Husband and wife are held in the palm of God’s hand.

And so, Jesus is not giving a simple discourse on marriage.
Jesus is revealing what belongs to God, and in the process,
denouncing the possession that the Pharisees have taken
of what belongs to God.

We do not own love.

We do not own ourselves.

We do not own one another.

How easily we forget that the sacred bonds between us
—in particular that between husband and wife—
are indwelt by God, and belong to God.

The Pharisees have completely lost sight of this,
the Pharisees have completely lost sight of God,
and they seek to possess and manipulate.

It is true that such bonds are very much “us”, and engage us,
but ultimately they belong to God, and they lead to God.

The second part of this passage seems unrelated
—but it actually sheds tremendous light on what we just tried to understand.

This incident with children being brought to Jesus
could very well be a completely separate incident.

But, for us, they are not randomly juxtaposed,
they are not together by chance, there is a connection.

Jesus reveals the attitude, the inner disposition
of those who truly enter the kingdom of God: like a child.

The innocence of a child opens a child to the kingdom, to the King.

Such inner disposition ought to be ours
by the refashioning of the Holy Spirit.

As complicated and as jaded as we may be,
we can be innocent again in our hearts.

It is God’s ambition to refresh us this deeply

And believe it or not, such inner disposition, such childlike availability is *also* the key to deep, loving relationships, to a deeply healthy marriage

And thus, we need to ask ourselves:

- Do I stand before God like a child, i.e. ready to receive with trust?
- Am I willing to let go and let God—truly?
- Do I receive my loved ones from the hand of God with awe and trust like that of a child?