

16 August 2024 - Friday of the 19th week 'B

[Ezekiel 16:1...63; Matt 19:3, 12](#)

Homily

Jesus' teaching in this Gospel is about fidelity, both fidelity in marriage and fidelity in celibacy. I say 'in' marriage and 'in' celibacy, because you are not faithful to marriage or celibacy, but to a person. In celibacy, we are faithful to the person of Jesus Christ, since it was with a view to his kingdom that we became celibate; and in marriage, we are also faithful to Jesus Christ, but this fidelity is then embodied in fidelity to a wife or a husband.

Jesus' answer to the Pharisees' question is constructed according to the usual rules of parallelism, which are constantly found in biblical literature. He begins by talking about marital fidelity and ends, after the disciples' expression of surprise, by saying: "Not everyone can understand this, but only those to whom it has been given". In fact, if we read this text according to the rules of Semitic parallelism, this sentence is related to what precedes and not what follows. Jesus is therefore saying that the indissolubility of marriage is something that can only be understood as an aspect of God's plan for man and woman, and that it can only be understood by those who have received the revelation of this divine plan.

Jesus then immediately adds his teaching on celibacy, and ends with an almost identical sentence: 'He who has the power to understand, let him understand', that is to say, he who has been given the power to understand. Moreover, Jesus makes a clear distinction between celibacy chosen with a view to building up the kingdom of heaven and in response to a call, and celibacy that is a consequence of an inability to marry, whether this inability is physical or not, and whether it is of birth or caused by men.

Yesterday the Gospel spoke to us of the forgiveness of offences, and Jesus presented his Father as a model. Today he reveals to us the foundation of all faithfulness, which is none other than the faithfulness of God, who does not allow himself to be affected by any unfaithfulness towards him. The first reading, from the book of Ezekiel, describes God's faithfulness to Israel in a very graphic way, comparing it to a little girl who was abandoned and thrown into a field as a child, whom God picked up and cared for until she reached marriageable age, when he made her his wife and made her his queen -- a wife towards whom he remains faithful and loving even when she is unfaithful to him. A husband or wife is called to remain faithful even when betrayed by his or her spouse, in the image of God's

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faithfulness. Those who have consecrated themselves in celibacy for the Kingdom, and who have attached themselves either to the diocesan Church through the priesthood or to a religious community through vows, must remain faithful even when they consider that the Church or the community are not faithful to them... or even if they have the impression, as some people sometimes do, that God himself has abandoned them.

Let us ask God for the understanding that makes it possible for us to be faithful to all our commitments.