

**“WHAT THEREFORE GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER, LET NOT MAN SEPARATE” - Biblical  
Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

***Mark 10, 2-16***

***And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast 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 separate.”***

***And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”***

***And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.***

Every time Jesus announces his message, God’s good news, that love is for all humanity, here in Mark’s gospel, appear as always the enemy of this message. Moreover, they are not the sinners, but the pious ones the zealots, guardians of the law, the Pharisees.

Let us see what the evangelist Mark writes. *“And Pharisees came.. “* these people that put into practice all the commandments and observations of the law, *“...in order to test him asked,., “* the verb to test appears for the first time at the beginning of the gospel for the actions of Satan, then the evangelist always attributes it to the Pharisees. How is it that these people considered holy, the holy ones of the time, admired for their observations of the law, for the evangelist and Jesus they are only the instruments of the devil? Because while God is love that puts itself at the service of the people, the devil is the power that dominates.

So the Pharisees dominate, also for religious reasons, they dominate the people; and they dominate in the name of God. This, for Jesus is intolerable. Who dominates, even if it is for religious reasons, in the name of God, is always an instrument of the devil.

*“..came up and in order to test him asked,.. “ they asked a question to which the answer was obvious. In fact they ask, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” Of course yes, it was known. No one put into discussion the possibility on the behalf of a man to divorce his wife, the problem was to know what were the causes for doing so.*

But why do they ask this question? Because they see, that Jesus speaks of this love for all humanity and he does not distinguish between man and woman. So they want to take Jesus into a familiar area where the power of the man, husband over the wife was without doubt,. Jesus does not reply, but asks another question.

*“What did Moses command you?” It is strange that Jesus did not ask “What did Moses command us” because he was also a Jew. But he takes his distance from Moses’ laws. For Jesus not all that was written in the law, to which attributes itself to a divine authority, was real. Already in the previous chapter, Jesus had declared all foods are clean.*

These were the evangelist Mark’s comments of Jesus’ actions, in contradiction to what was written in the book of Leviticus. Part of what was written in the law in giving in to the perverse human inclinations. So what was it that Moses commanded? They said, *“Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away”*

This is found in the Book of Deuteronomy chapter 24, where it is written *“ When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes.. “ In Jesus’ time the discussion was on what was the significance of not finding favor. “... because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house... “,*

So it was a piece of paper on which the husband wrote: “From today you are no more my wife” and he sent her away. The motive, the discussion at the time of Jesus was to understand what was indecent. Well, Jesus answers them: *“Because of your hardness of heart..”*. In the Hebrew world the heart was not the place of affections, but the head, mind and conscience.

So, for your hardness and for your heartlessness... and again Jesus takes his distance. While the Pharisees refer to Moses and God’s law, Jesus refers to the beginning of the creation, *“ God made them male and female. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,...”*

Here Jesus uses the verse from the book of Genesis, and brings out the personal consent, the marriage was a contract between families, and Jesus recalls the original design. *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife,”* The father is the one that gave security, the mother unconditioned love,

Jesus was interested in the union of the man and woman, this love that makes them one. "... *they shall become one flesh.*" Jesus talks of two people that find in each other protection, a security bigger than that which their father could give them and an unconditioned love even bigger than that which their mother could offer.

*"What therefore God has joined together let not man separate."* Two people can separate, but when they become one, they are undividable because it would be a mutilation. What Jesus had said causes no reaction from the Pharisees, but on the behalf of the disciples, they find this novelty of Jesus unacceptable.

In fact, *"And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter."* Therefore it was a heartfelt problem for them. It is a security of the religious institution, of the tradition, and Jesus says to them, *"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband....."*

This is strange because in the Hebrew world that a woman can divorce her husband does not exist .... Jesus makes a universal law. *"..and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."*

Jesus always takes the side of the weaker person. At that time it was accepted that a man had enough power over his wife be able to send her away. For Jesus this was unacceptable. He is always on the side of the weak. The verse began with the leaders of the society, the Pharisees, and ends with those at the bottom, just to make a contrast.

*"And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them."* Who are these children? The children were insignificant beings, the last of the society, those that have no value. They are presented to Jesus so he can touch them and communicate life, well the disciples are angry at this desire of supremacy, hierarchy, they do not tolerate it and they rebuke them.

*"..when Jesus saw it, he was indignant,..."* This is the only time in Mark's gospel that Jesus is indignant and says to them *"Let the children come to me; do not hinder them.."* Jesus says this forcefully, *"... for to such belongs the kingdom of God."* In contrast to the Pharisees that believe, that for their holiness, for their observance of the laws, merited the kingdom of God; Jesus proposes the most humble of society.

It is an invitation to the disciples who continue to argue between themselves to who is the most important, the Pharisees or the most humble. God for love has placed himself beside the most humble and who wants to be with him must become humble. And Jesus says, *"Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."* To enter into the kingdom of God, Jesus' alternative society, one must be humble.

*" And he took them in his arms..."* so Jesus identified with them *"... and blessed them, laying his hands on them."* Therefore, Jesus blessed those that in the society were considered the last, the dregs, they are nearer to him.