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There could hardly be a better introduction to the Bible than the Book of Genesis' two stories of creation. To begin with, these stories immediately show us that the Bible is teaching a kind of truth that is not found in either history or science books. With two incompatible explanations of the beginnings of the human race, we quickly realize that Genesis speaks to us of meaning and truth, not mere facts.

That's why, when someone asked Jesus about relationships, he started with the meaning of the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis.

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Genesis 2:18-24

Psalm 128

Hebrews 2:9-11

Mark 10:2-16

The author of the second chapter of Genesis enjoyed a deep awareness of what makes us images of God. The writer weaves a tale of God fashioning a creature endowed with godly characteristics. Then, feeling compassion for the loneliness of that one-of-a-kind creature, God made other living creatures, all of whom the new human could name but none of whom could reply to him.

Then God got the idea to make another person: one like the first, only different. (We might wonder why a Trinitarian God didn't figure that out in the first place, but the author of Genesis 2 was telling the story to make a particular point.)

The author of Genesis 1 wanted us to realize that human beings were creation's crowning image of God: the best saved for last. The author of Genesis 2 reflected more on who we can be for one another. Explained through the symbol of a couple, the story reflects on the fact that we become fully human through the communication that builds relationships.

Adam was nothing more than an animal guardian and gardener before he met Eve. Then, when each met the other as a thinking, speaking person, their lives became fertile. They realized they were uniquely made for each other. Learning to love, they grew in their likeness to their creator.

As Teilhard de Chardin would teach a few thousand years later, when Adam met Eve, creation was on its way back to its maker.

This was the scriptural backdrop on the day that some Pharisees tried to hook Jesus into a debate about the legality of dismissing a wife as if she were a worn-out coat or a troublesome piece of household furniture. Their question focused on what was "lawful."

Jesus amplified the question, trying to open their minds. Jesus admitted what the law said, and reminded them that the law served the narrow purpose of reining in hard hearts. Then he cut to the chase by reminding them that God created human beings for one another and that no person can be dismissed, rejected or marginalized without diminishing the entire order of creation.

There is little doubt that Jesus wanted to shake up his questioners. By basing his answer on Genesis rather than the law of Moses, he invited his audience to consider not just Israel and her law, but God's purpose in creation. Then, reinterpreting Moses' law in that light, he supplanted their patriarchal, male-dominant mindset with an approach that honored the equality of the sexes.

According to the law of the day, men alone had the right to initiate a divorce and adultery was considered a violation of a man's property rights. Jesus' teaching accorded women in the same dignity and responsibility as their male counterparts.

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While Jesus' teaching referred specifically to marriage, the idea underlying his response defended the inalienable dignity of all people and the fact that we are made for one another.

Because Jesus spoke his ban on divorce in a particular historical context, it would be anachronistic to assume that it applies literally and in detail to other epochs and vastly different cultural circumstances. What stands and must be inculturated in

every time and place is the human vocation to love one another into ever greater wholeness and unity.

Mark told us that the Pharisees were trying to test Jesus. They should have known better. Nobody ever succeeded in that effort. Jesus had a knack for turning hypocrisy inside out, questioning the questioners, and exposing people trapped by narrowness to an attractive bigger vision.

Some will hear today's Liturgy of the Word as a rationale for enforcing the letter of the law and setting limits to our ecclesial communion. Others may experience the grace of being caught up in the Genesis vision of humanity's potential for union with God and neighbor, or be challenged by Jesus' invitation to esteem each person as a unique gift of God.

Genesis 1 and 2 teach that God placed us in the midst of creation to enjoy and grow in communion with one another in the image of the Trinity. Jesus invites us to live into that truth for the rest of our lives.

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