

Sunday: Ordinary 27, Cycle B, 10.4.15
 Scripture: Gen 2:18-24/Hebrews 2:9-11/
 Mk 10:2-16

THE JOY OF BEING COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

Susan Schneider is very good at what she does - but she's "never felt quite right" making a living writing about something she hasn't done too well within her own life. She writes for wedding magazines. As the former editor of **Modern Bride** and **Elegant Bride** magazines, Ms. Schneider has spent the last ten years helping engaged women toward their big day. But she soon became very wary of the adjective "Perfect": The Perfect Dress. The Perfect Cake. The Perfect Day.

She writes: "I worry that the bridal industry's emphasis on perfecting every last detail, which invariably involves hemorrhaging money, can lead to unrealistic expectations of marriage. In the best of circumstances, what a letdown to discover dishes in the sink, socks on the floor, and all those wedding bills to pay afterward. Not to mention more serious troubles like mine and my ex-husband's, which were ultimately about a mutual inability to walk in each other's shoes. Each of us needed the other to be something neither was, and we hurt each other even when we didn't mean to. We weren't able to take things with a grain of salt and a dash of humor. We certainly weren't ready for real married life."



The wedding magazine writer believes it's time to rethink the idea of a "Perfect" wedding: *"Weddings should be about the basic underpinnings of our lives:*

love and commitment and family. A wedding is a life celebration so touching that, speaking as a guest, I usually end up with tears streaming down my face - I guess because we so rarely get to witness life's real meaning." That's the real stuff of "fairy tale weddings": love, hope, generosity of heart and spirit. *"Now that I'm not 'selling' weddings anymore, I can appreciate them for what they are: sweet and precious moments that ease us into our real lives, which will probably not be perfect, but will, if we're lucky, be pretty happy all the same."*

As Susan Schneider has discovered in her work and life, a successful marriage - a marriage built on compassion, trust and forgiveness - transcends the "fairy tale" aura of the "Perfect" wedding. In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of marriage as the joining of two hearts into one by God. It demands not perfection but commitment; it requires the hard work of patience, understanding and humility. It moves beyond the "hardness of heart" to embrace a spirit of generosity and selflessness. A couple's life together and their generous response to the vocation of parenthood model the unfathomable and profound love of God. In the life a couple creates together, life that means both taking on and letting go for the sake of the other, Christ is the ever-present Wedding Guest, who makes their simple, everyday life together a miraculous sacrament in which the love of God is revealed to others in their love for each another.

Our ancient scripture story echoes that theme of 'togetherness' as a way of life. After Adam saw and named all of the animals in creation, God saw that Adam was still alone. The lion had a lioness, the goose had a gander, and the rooster had a chicken. But for the man, no mate, no equal partner. And for the first time in the Biblical story, after several specific times when God reflected on aspects of His creation and thought it was "good," God saw the lack of

companionship in Adam and thought, "This isn't so good!" So God used a spare rib from Adam to make woman. When Adam awoke from the anesthesia of his surgery, and God presented Eve to him, his response was an exuberant cry; "This is the one!" Adam seems to be jumping up and down with glee. His joy is unrestrained. His immediate connection with Eve is contagious happiness. "Bone of my bones" and "flesh of my flesh" means sharing both strength and weakness. This biblical act of creation doesn't describe what has commonly been interpreted as the 'fairer sex' being hatched and watched over by the strong man. This is an equal partnership, sharing both strength and weakness, sickness and health, good times and bad.

God is pleased with this expression of joy. God wants humankind to have significant companionship. And a holy marriage between a man and woman can fulfill that joy in God's heart. And so can the companionship that people find in a significant friendship; the happiness that's displayed in community events, like our Parish Carnival; the joy that being a minister or public servant brings. It isn't good for man to be alone, or woman either.

On a festive weekend like Oktoberfest it didn't seem appropriate to focus on that part of the scriptures which speak about the breakdown of relationship. We all know about or have experienced the pain that comes from divorce. It has touched most of our families, including mine, and is always a source of struggle and discouragement. But we've come a long way in our pastoral practice and our community response to those whose lives have been broken by the failures of marriage. I've seen many parishioners here at St. Perpetua's who are harbors of comfort and support for those who have separated or divorced -- with kindness, understanding and even humor, helping them to pick up the

pieces, restore their lost dignity and begin to live full and happy lives again. Those are the things that make me proud to be a Catholic - to be part of a community that is able to celebrate the ideal, as I've done at wedding Masses for nearly four decades, but also to be present to and understanding of the daily realities and human struggles of people, struggles which Jesus himself embraced. The Letter to the Hebrews said it beautifully: *Jesus is not ashamed to call them* -- to call us -- *brothers and sisters*.

Today at St. Peter's in Rome the same scripture readings we just heard will be heard by those who are participating in the Synod on the Family, which begins today and will continue until October 25. The meeting will involve 279 bishops from more than 120 nations, 17 married couples and 17 auditors, as well as other non-voting representatives. These scriptures will set the tone for the historic gathering. The participants will have to view many contentious issues facing families in the Church through two lens: the lens of scripture and the real lives of the Catholic faithful. The bishops who are attending the three-week synod will debate issues ranging from how to deal with the prevalence of divorce, to ways to counsel young couples who live together but do not want to get married, to how to recognize the children of same-sex couples. Proclaiming the ideal while dealing with the real.



My prayer is that this Synod on the Family will strive to be of service to families

as they struggle with their realities. The issues are many. The solutions are not clear. Practical forms of accompaniment and church assistance, like being able to offer the sacraments to divorced and remarried Catholics who do not have annulments, how best to minister to families of mixed religion, how to deal with couples who are living together without benefit of matrimony, how to minister and be welcoming to gay couples and their children— all these present significant challenges to the synod participants. The ideals of a lifelong marriage and a stable family that are held up in the readings today are still valid. But we struggle to reach those ideals. In our human frailty we rely on God's understanding and mercy, and on each other for support. We are all in this together.

So, the teachings of today's gospel aren't specifically about divorce and remarriage; they're not even about women and children, as much as women and children have been victimized throughout the centuries in all societies and cultures. No, these teachings are about you and me -- about our God-given dignity, about the deep love and care in which each of us is held by our God, about the life of each human being that we are called to honor and respect. About the beauty and joy of being together whether in marriage, or in friendship, or in community. And those teachings still need to be learned and re-learned.

Fr. John Kasper, OSFS