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*A man had been in a public telephone booth for half an hour. He seemed to be very bored. Though he held the receiver to his ear, he made no attempt to speak. At last, a member of the crowd outside, exasperated with waiting, opened the door and asked abruptly. 'Are you **speaking to anybody?**' The silent one replied, 'Yes, I'm speaking to my wife'*

In the book of Genesis God said: it's not good for man to be alone'. Aloneness can be felt even in a marriage if the couple's relationship is strained.

The effects of original Sin don't make it easy for men and women to understand each other properly. But for those who enter into the Sacrament of marriage, bodily intimacy is meant to be a sign and pledge of spiritual communion. But if there is little or no spiritual growth in the life of the couple, their marriage could easily end up on shaky ground. It's the difference between building a house on rock or on sand.

Couples co-operate with God in bringing new life into the world. This is a noble calling. It is part of the nature of spousal love that the couples are always open to the creation of new life. Not withholding your fertility is fundamental to giving yourself to your spouse. This is what elevates marriage to the level of a sacrament with a unique dignity. When Jesus welcomed children in today's Gospel, I'm sure he was encouraging married couples to accept children lovingly as a gift from God and not see them as a burden or getting in the way of one's misguided freedom or career advancement.

Sacramental marriage is based on the Paschal mystery when Christ laid down his life for love of us. Married people lay down their lives for each other. Every time married couples come to Mass they are in a real sense renewing their nuptial vows and the priest who is married to the church community is renewing his ordination promises. We're all in this together.

We say animals reproduce but humans procreate. It's the design of the creator that procreation should take place within marriage when husband and wife become one through physical and spiritual intimacy. Babies also have a right to be conceived in the context of a loving spousal union. The problem with the conception of babies outside the womb is that many fertilised embryos are discarded, a procedure the church regards as morally problematic.

Divorce is fairly widespread in our society. For one reason or another the couple become estranged and separate which is by and large not good news for their children. I know there is a hotly contested debate about to start in Rome shortly about whether to admit divorced people who have married again to communion under certain conditions. If that happens would it compromise Jesus's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage or is it the compassionate thing to do. We'll see how it pans out in the weeks ahead.

In God's plan the genders complement each other in the physical, psychological and spiritual sense. But that is even questioned today in some quarters. Some would reduce the role of male and female to a mere function, interchangeable at will. In this case the complementary nature of the genders ceases to be based on anthropology, but purely on function. Blurring that distinction doesn't do anyone any good and undermines marriage.

Jesus came to raise marriage to the dignity of a sacrament. Based on the Paschal mystery, the love of husband and wife will, albeit dimly, be a reflection of God's undiluted love for all his creatures.