

27 (B)

A little humorous incident from the reader's digest: Our four year old daughter, Marian, had been a bit mischievous and I had tried to correct her. I was sitting in the easy chair reading the paper. Her mother was sitting quietly on the sofa mending some clothes. Our daughter climbed on to the sofa very close to her mother and said: 'Mammy, do you think we married the right man'?

In the book of Genesis God said: 'it's not good for man to be alone'. You could feel alone even in marriage if husbands and wives feel disaffected with each other.

When God is side-lined, there is a temptation to concentrate overly on the physical and overlook the fact that physical intimacy in marriage is also a sign and pledge of spiritual communion. It's not something purely biological.

Couples co-operate with God in bringing new life into the world. Its fifty years since the landmark encyclical 'Humane Vitae' was promulgated by Pope Paul VI, soon to be canonised, but it's also a sort of canonisation of his teaching which at the time didn't go down very well. This was a kind of watershed moment of dissent within the Church on many other related issues. A lot of what Pope Paul foretold has actually come true. He said for instance: 'With the advent of artificial contraception, people should first consider how easy it will be for many to justify behaviour leading to marital infidelity or to a gradual weakening in discipline and morals'. The 'me too' movement which we're hearing a lot about these days is plenty evidence of this and I would say only the 'tip of the iceberg'. When Jesus welcomed children in today's Gospel, I'm sure he was encouraging married couples to accept children lovingly from God and not see them as a burden or a hindrance to their freedom to do other things.

We say animals reproduce but humans procreate. It's the design of the creator that procreation should take place within the union of marriage. If children are 'made' by clinical technicians in the laboratory, there is the danger that they may be seen as commodities and not as persons. Here man is acting alone and not in line with his Creator.

The scourge of divorce is fairly widespread where husband and wife are struggling 'to become one' in the gospel sense. Males and females are meant to complement each other and in this way they reflect the image and likeness of God. Some would reduce the role of male and female to a mere function, interchangeable at will. In this case the male and female complementary natures cease to be based on anthropology, but purely on function. In God's eternal plan for the human family, males and females are given different and distinct roles to play. Blurring that distinction only leads to confusion, especially among the young.

Jesus came to redeem marriage and raise it to the dignity of a sacrament. The chaste love of husband and wife is intended to be a reflection, albeit dimly, of God's undiluted love for us. It's based on the Paschal mystery. According to St John Paul, marriage in the Lord is the primordial sacrament, the sanctity of which leads to a couple's ultimate happiness and a stability of society at large.