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-- This weekend at our cathedral several hundred couples, including a few from our parish, are gathering to celebrate with our bishop special wedding anniversaries, from 25th to over 60 years of marriage.

-- I imagine that they and their families will hear these readings with joy, hope and the assurance of God's enduring love. People engaged to be married will hear these readings with hope for their upcoming marriages and their future lives together.

-- But there are others who will hear them very differently. That's particularly true of our gospel. Jesus normally appears to be sympathetic to people's weak spots. But he seems so unyielding here: no exceptions to the rule, those who violate it are guilty of adultery.

-- Does this mean that the couples who are at the cathedral this weekend are morally superior, e.g., to the woman who escaped an abusive marriage and then found a caring man to care for her and her children...or, for that matter, anyone whose marriage has failed?

-- That's the wrong question to ask. It's not our job to judge an individual person's moral righteousness. And I'm sure most of the people up at the cathedral would agree with that (as would Pope Francis).

-- Jesus was responding to a question from some Pharisees, *Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?* For Jews, only a husband could initiate divorce not a wife. He had the power—he was in control.

-- Later in the passage, Mark adds the line about a wife divorcing her husband. That's because he wrote to a Gentile community. Roman law allowed wives to divorce husbands. But, practically speaking, that was only possible if she had independent wealth, independent power.

-- Jesus was speaking up for the powerless. He was saying *No, you can't dump your wife*. Today he might say that you can't trade her in for a new model because you are tired of her.

-- Notice he follows this by taking children in his arms and blessing them. As I mentioned two weeks ago, children then were powerless, even more so than children today. Jesus again was sticking up for the vulnerable.

-- But he was also revealing to us God's plan for marriage and family life. Yes, God made us the way we are—male and female—for a reason. He meant marriage to be for life. He wanted the faithfulness of marriage to reflect God's faithful love for us.

-- We know how children are hurt by the failure of marriages. Studies prove this. Even when that is the only viable alternative, children bear the scars of the breakup.

-- I would hope those of you who have survived many years of marriage together and those of you who may have experienced failure could agree with these things. As followers of Christ, we are called to do all we can to strengthen marriages and family life.

-- Soon, selected bishops around the world, along with select laity, will meet in Rome for the Synod on the Family. This is the second part of an effort for the Church to respond to the challenges to marriage and family life in our world today.

-- We should pray for God's wisdom and inspiration for those who will meet and make some steps to try to strengthen marriage and family life. And we should resolve to seek God's strength for ourselves.

-- Those of you who are married should seek God's help in prayer and in practical steps to strengthen your relationship. All of us should seek to support our families, in whatever form and circumstances we find ourselves in presently.

-- For God wants to uphold the value of marriage and family life. And God also wants to care for those who are most vulnerable. May we echo God's loving care in all we do to support family life.