

09/18/16 25 C

-- God's word today gives us a lot to think about: how we treat the poor, how we live together in peace and how we treat wealth. But this week, we are being asked by our diocese to reflect on God's mercy toward a particular group of people: those who are divorced, and especially those who have been remarried.

-- So it's one of those unusual weeks when I will be giving more of a sermon than a homily. How we as a Church treat those in this situation reflects back on how we live together as a community.

-- God has a plan for marriage which he reveals in the scriptures: *At the beginning of creation he made them male and female...and the two shall become one flesh...Therefore, what God has joined together humans must not separate.* God intends marriage to be for life.

-- Pope Francis affirms the permanency of marriage in his recent letter *the Joy of Love* and says any breach of the marriage bond "is against the will of God." At the same time, he calls us to accompany those who are weak and wounded and to restore hope in them.

-- Some of you may have heard him say that the Church is often a "field hospital." The purpose of a field hospital is to treat traumatic wounds and stabilize people. In a spiritual sense, divorce is often one of those "traumatic wounds."

-- We as a Church community must reach out to those who suffer this trauma. Our diocese is encouraging us to do this, and to redouble our efforts to support those who suffer from divorce. People who have been through that trauma and survived are often the best to support those hurting.

-- So we will be looking for people in our local area who can participate in this ministry. We want to make clear to those who have divorced and have not remarried that they should make full use of the Church's sacraments, especially Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

- We also need to reach out to those who have been remarried after divorce. They are still a part of the Church family; we no longer look on them as “excommunicated.” They need our support and prayers.
- Some may have mistaken ideas about the annulment process in the Church. Recently, some changes have been made to simplify it and often to cut the time for the process by a few months. We no longer “charge” for annulments (though the process never depended on payment).
- Anyone who has questions about this process can come to me for answers. If it is a complicated question, I will find an answer for you.
- Meanwhile, all of us should show mercy toward those who have experienced failed marriages. For few of us have not been touched by this in our own families.
- Mercy does not mean we compromise the truth or back off of our teaching on the permanence of marriage. But it does mean showing understanding to those who have failed. For all of us have failed in one way or another to live the life that the Lord has called us to live. We all are subject to sin, and should not be the first to throw a stone.
- We should also be ministering to those in troubled marriages, often on the brink of divorce. The Church has supported the Retrouvaille Process for couples in that situation who are willing to give it an honest shot.
- A Retrouvaille will be held in two weeks at the Weber Center in Adrian. Information can be obtained through their website *retrouvaille.org* on how to register and what is involved. (I can give you the spelling)
- As a diocese and as a parish, we must be concerned with the welfare of all of our people, especially those who are hurting. The divorced, and especially those remarried outside the Church, are a part of these, and often most vulnerable to leaving the Catholic Church.
- We cannot abandon them, for they are precious to God and the Church.