

I have written
(Breaks of Bread)
A couple of days ago, there was an article/interview in the paper about an English comedian, some of whose TV shows have been seen here, who's got a reputation of being rather vulgar and salacious in his humour. But he had some very wise and penetrating comments to make on life and his experiences, in answer to his interviewer's questions. One of his remarks (which the interviewer evidently didn't understand at all), was that "you cannot win, in love." It's not only that interviewer, though, who has trouble understanding a remark like that — there are very many people who have become disillusioned, even cynical, about ideas like love being forever, about marriage, or even the very institution of marriage. Yet all of these are great human talking points, and maybe are being talked about even more as their breakdowns have become more widespread, and more accepted by society. And that's not something new. In Jesus' day, too (as the gospel reading of last Sunday's liturgy may have reminded you), the topic was a live one. There was a catching phrase in that particular excerpt from St Mark — you remember, after the public confrontation with Jesus over the question of the legality of divorce, St Mark says "Back in the house, the disciples questioned Him again about this." Indeed, concerning marriage, people have always had questions. Long before Jesus' time, people had concluded that God himself instituted marriage, that marriage was ordained in heaven. But then (as now) sometimes people found fidelity too "unreasonable", and found a way out in the divorce customs of nations around them — even had Moses' "permission" for it. So, when the Pharisees asked Jesus about the divorce question, it seems they were really trying to corner Him on one side of a fierce on-going debate about interpretation. But

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He refused to be drawn on this: whenever He did take sides in current debate, it was always where there were differences about the heart of the matter — but here the arguments weren't. What was the heart of this matter? Jesus went straight to it: God made humanity male and female, so that individuals would cling to each other in life-long marriage, the two becoming one body. This "heart of the matter" is not what we today tend to focus on, either. Perhaps because humanity is half mystery and half mischief, we love bad news: so we let our thinking about marriage focus on the problem areas, on the pathological. We fuss about what we call "insensitive" or "inhuman" laws of the church, blaming celibates for being out of touch, or whatnot. And the deepest truth about marriage gets buried under mountains of reasoning and resentment — that people are made for life-long union with another and the two selves will come to be as they come to be together. It's so much more than romantic dreams, or the current fascination with pressure-cooker intimacy (as Stone has called it). This is what Jesus explained — that people in marriage are no longer two, but one body: "what God has united, man must not divide." In this, the New Testament goes so much beyond the Old, where the dissolution of a marriage was allowed for. And Jesus also took this occasion to stress the renewed equality of women and men in this matter. "Back in the house" (as St Mark put it) the disciples of Christ have time to think about all of this — and it does take time. It's what we should be taking time about too, in the house of God, in prayer, to try to understand the Word of God, and find how to live by it. In prayer today, let's pray especially for all Christian couples, that their love may truly bring them

to be one body, in Christ, and in the love of God. / But first, a little music —

With Open Hands
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"We are many parts"

MUSIC - PRAYERS

For the Christian,

the presumption is that in the sacrament of marriage, the Spirit of God leads people to assert or to yield, to act or to wait, to enjoy or to undergo, precisely in order to make the two become one body. It may not be quite so clear or certain that, for those who do not know Christ, such self-surrender for the sake of married union is demanded: but it is certain that such surrender is demanded of Christ's disciples. For the Spirit of God has given us hearts of flesh on which are written the law of love. And that law plainly tells us that the impossible dream of every romantic is not impossible at all — lifelong fidelity, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to have and to hold as closely as one's own self... such love, where there's no winning or losing, is not impossible. "Back in the house", with Jesus, your own house: there the problems and the pressures are different from what's talked about and done in the market place. No doubt there are social pressures today, tending to prize and tear marriages apart — but what people say publicly isn't always what they really feel in their hearts. Where do we take our standards and norms from? Let us pray for people, our own friends & acquaintances maybe, who are in difficulty or trouble, torn maybe between conscience and what's socially acceptable, that they may find courage and strength in God's grace to go on giving & loving and growing in a love which must be vulnerable because, back in the house, it's no longer two but one body that tells (however imperfectly) that God's love is faithful, and for ever.