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27<sup>th</sup> Sunday, Oct 7, 2018

The focus of today's readings is on marriage and divorce. The Scriptures are rich, complex, and in some ways troublesome. Our first reading is from the second—and older—creation story in Genesis. While it stresses that woman has a similar nature to man, it has been interpreted to say that woman's existence, psychologically and in the social order, is dependent on man. We know how profound and painful this issue is. Moreover, we are also aware of how Genesis has been used to justify humanity's domination—indeed, abuse—of the rest of creation. Such power is implied in today's passage when the man names each being.

If the relationships between people and with creation are problematic parts of Genesis, the second reading raises questions about God. Today we begin a series of readings from the letter to the Hebrews. It is helpful to remember that this is not a letter—it is a written sermon. It is not to Hebrews—but to Christians, some of whom may have Jewish backgrounds. And it was not written by Paul—as was stated for centuries. This sermon is an exhortation to a community in crisis to persevere in hope and faith. Its focus, rooted in interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures, is on Christ as the unique, eternal high priest and as the model of faith. Today's passage presents the familiar theory of expiation—that God willed Jesus' suffering and death for the sake of all. An understandable theory in the context, but one that seems to contradict Jesus' own vision of a merciful and loving God.

Finally, the gospel presents Jesus' teaching on divorce, as modified by the evangelist. Mark adapts to the Gentile world Jesus' conviction, adding the part about a woman divorcing her husband. Jesus would not have said that, because Jewish women could not divorce Jewish men. In our context today, we are

keenly aware of the seriousness of divorce. Along with Pope Francis we search for ways to be faithful to Jesus' vision and to be compassionate and wise in our own real world.

Let's listen to God's word!

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Today is Respect Life Sunday. Perhaps this theme provides us with a lens for viewing these scriptures. As we know from recent elections, Respect Life has often meant a very narrow focus. We would do well to retrieve Cardinal Bernardin's consistent ethic of life, both its content and spirit. His vision would help us value all life, calling us beyond separation and oppression of women to mutuality and discipleship of equals, beyond abuse and domination of the earth's resources to stewardship and care for all creation, beyond a vindictive God to a gracious God and a faithful Jesus, beyond legalism to commitment and compassion.

When we are honest with ourselves, we acknowledge how challenging it is to embrace fully the consistent ethic of life and its roots, the life and teaching of Jesus. In different parts of our lives, we and so many others seem to base our judgments on economic and political worldviews rather than on the Gospel. Values cluster around conservative or liberal, but not around Jesus' call. Unexamined prejudices color our decisions and shape our actions.

Just think of recent events in Washington DC. And soon we face another election. Given the reality of the political parties in the United States, just about every vote will contradict some aspect of the consistent ethic of life. This is a tragic reality. So a fundamental choice must be made. Since respecting life is the heart of the consistent ethic, I have now concluded that I must choose the main candidate whose positions and policies best defend life. Two issues have emerged as the key for my choice: nuclear arms and the environment.

There is, of course, a long list of other serious life issues, including poverty, violence, abortion, health care, racism, and on and on. However serious they are (and most are very serious, threatening many lives), none threatens all life. That is what makes the difference. The use of nuclear weapons or the destruction of the environment can wipe out humanity.

Today, this month, this lifetime, how will you choose to respect life?