

Complete in Him – Trinity 9 2016

Genesis 18 vv 20-32 p18, Psalm 138, Colossians 2 vv 6-15 p1183, Luke 11 vv 1-13 p1042

This is the Greek philosopher Plato on the subject of marriage. *To understand the power of Love, we must understand that our original human nature was not like it is now, but different. Human beings each had two sets of arms, two sets of legs, and two faces looking in opposite directions.* I don't think he believed this literally. It's a myth to make his point that men and women are essentially one in marriage with each other. The myth goes on that the gods were jealous of our power and our love and that therefore they separated us and turned us into individuals, always feeling incomplete, always looking for our other halves. He goes on, *Each of us when separated, having one side only, is but the indenture of a person, and we are always looking for our other half. And when one of us meets our other half, we are lost in an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy, and would not be out of the other's sight even for a moment. We pass our whole lives together, desiring that we should be melted into one, to spend our lives as one person instead of two, and so that after our death there will be one departed soul instead of two; this is the very expression of our ancient need. And the reason is that human nature was originally one and we were a whole, and the desire and pursuit of the whole is called Love.*

I found this on a website suggesting suitable readings for weddings. It wouldn't be entirely suitable for a Christian wedding. We weren't made with eight limbs! God certainly isn't jealous of us. A married couple do not become one soul. Husband and wife each preserve their own individuality in all eternity, while they do in fact, for this life, become one flesh.

The Christian account of marriage has some similarities to Plato's, but, of course, it is a much more realistic depiction of the way things are between people and between people and God. Myth or history, the Christian story is that, having made Adam, the LORD God said, *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.* God presents all the different kinds of animal to Adam and Adam names them all. They are his dominion, his responsibility. What man needs, however, is another human being to love and to love him. *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.* So God causes Adam to fall into a deep sleep, takes one of his ribs and forms it into a woman. When he wakes up, the man says, *This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.* We are made for one another. *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.* When questioned about divorce, Jesus, the second Adam, took up this very same theme, saying, *But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*

On our own, we are incomplete. We are unfulfilled. We cannot be satisfied. God has made us for one another. As St Paul told the Athenian philosophers (Plato's much less illustrious successors), *God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.* All human beings are one in Adam, *the offspring of God.* It is God's Will that all His children live in harmony and love just as human parents love to see their children loving one another. We are divided from God and from one another by our sin, our self-centredness,

but, potentially we are all made one once again through faith in the second Adam, Jesus Christ. The work of the Church is reconciliation, reconciling man to God and man to man. *And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given us the ministry of reconciliation: To wit that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*

Jesus speaks of that special relationship of love between husband and wife as being joined together by God and, elsewhere in the New Testament, the marriage bond is likened to the relationship between Christ and His Church, between Christ and the believer, between Christ and the Body of believers who are one in the unity of the divine love – *one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church*, or, to put it more succinctly, us!

Where was I? That human beings are incomplete without loving relationships. I should be the last to say that marriage is necessary to human fulfilment. It is very likely that marriage is the vocation of the majority, but it's not for all. It is *an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocence, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church*. It is the proper context for the procreation of children – a home in which the parents are unconditionally committed to one another, till death do them part. It is the proper context in which the mutual attraction a couple have for one another finds its physical expression, the gift of self as they honour one another in love. It is *ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity*.

Nevertheless, marriage isn't for everyone. Some are called to be single. Everyone is single before he or she marries. In most marriages, one dies first, leaving the other a widow or a widower, sometimes for many years. It is also true that human beings are human. We may find that we are unable to live up to the high ideals of unconditional love, that we really cannot keep the promises we made on our wedding day, to persevere in the relationship, *for better for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part*. Then maybe divorce follows and we ask man to put asunder what God has joined together. What follows then? Do we settle down to a life of celibacy or do we seek another relationship to try again?

Whether or not it is our calling to be married, we are incomplete without love. We looked to our parents to love us, our families. Perhaps we have very good friends we can always rely on. We do need to be loved. We need to love because that is what God made us for. We really need to be loved and to love unconditionally. That means that the person who loves us will always love us no matter what and we will love that person. It could be your mother, your wife or your best friend, but a person who loves you unconditionally will never give up on you. They won't abandon you because they have other priorities. They won't abandon you because they meet someone else they like better. They won't abandon you when you are at your most needy. They won't give up on you even if you behave really, really badly. There are very few people in our lives capable of offering that depth of love and we may count ourselves richly blessed if we have anyone like that whom we can always turn to and who would always feel able to turn to us, no matter what.

We are incomplete without love. *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.* We cannot be satisfied, we cannot be fulfilled, our essential humanity is lacking if we are not in a relationship of love.

And this is where we left off last week. There is only One Who can fulfil all the requirements of perfect love. There is only One Who can meet all our needs, One alone Who can satisfy, One alone Whose love can fulfil us, just One Who accepts our love unconditionally. This is one of the occasions when I am a bit disappointed in the New International Version of the Bible which we read in Church. From our New Testament Lesson, Colossians 2^{9&10}: *For in Christ all the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fulness in Christ, who is the Head over every power and authority.* My beloved King James Version has: *For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power. Ye are complete in him.* We all need to love and to be loved. We have many different relationships with many different people and some are perhaps more satisfying than others. There is One, however, Who both meets all our needs and Who will never turn us away. Without Jesus we can never be fulfilled. In Him, we are complete. His grace fills and fulfils us. Only in Christ are we complete as human beings. This is why St Augustine prayed, *Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.* Human life without Jesus is always insufficient. That is why so many people are always striving, desperate to fill every second with activity lest, if they pause, they find themselves staring into the abyss of meaninglessness. We always resist God. Augustine himself resisted God. So did S Paul. It is what the Church calls original sin, that twist in human nature, that self-centredness, which always resists the love of the only One in Whom we can find peace. If we are to live life in all its fulness, we have to love and to be loved. Only God can meet all our needs. So stop striving. Stop resisting. Let go and let God. Christ offered up Himself for us. The key to human fulfilment is our offering of ourselves to Him, in Him and through Him and by Him. *Oh, make but trial of His love, Experience will decide, How blest they are, and only they, Who in His truth confide.* To know God is to have eternal life. Listen to what the LORD says, *Be still then, and know that I am God.*

SoF 593: What a Friend We Have in Jesus.

Creed p148 7.