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## Father Cantalamessa on Marriage

### "Rediscover the Art of Repairing!" Says Pontifical Household Preacher

ROME, OCT. 6, 2006 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by the Pontifical Household preacher, Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, on the readings from this Sunday's liturgy.

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The Two Shall Become One Flesh

Genesis 2:18-24; Hebrews 2:9-11; Mark 10:2-16

The topic of this 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time is marriage. The first reading (Genesis 2:18-24) begins with the well-known words: "The Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'"

In our days the evil of marriage is separation and divorce, whereas in the time of Jesus it was repudiation. In a certain sense, the latter was a worse evil, because it also implied an injustice in regard to the woman, which, sadly, persists in certain cultures. Man, in fact, had the right to repudiate his wife, but the wife did not have the right to repudiate her husband.

There were two opposite opinions in Judaism, in regard to repudiation. According to one of them, it was lawful to repudiate one's wife for any reason, hence, at the discretion of the husband. According to another, however, a grave reason was necessary, established by the law.

One day they subjected Jesus to this question, hoping that he would adopt a position in favor of one or the other thesis. However, they received an answer they did not expect: "Because of the hardness of your hearts he [Moses] wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother (and be joined to his wife), and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate."

The law of Moses about repudiation is seen by Christ as an unwanted disposition, but tolerated by God (as polygamy and other disorders), because of hardness of heart and human immaturity. Jesus did not criticize Moses for the concession made; he recognized that in this matter the human lawmaker cannot fail to keep in mind the reality in fact.

However, he re-proposed to all the original ideal of the indissoluble union between man and woman -- "one flesh" -- that, at least for his disciples, must be the only form possible of marriage.

However, Jesus did not limit himself to reaffirming the law; he added grace to it. This means that Christian spouses not only have the duty to remain faithful until death; they also have the necessary aids to do so. From Christ's redeeming death comes a strength -- the Holy Spirit -- which permeates every aspect of the believer's

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life, including marriage. The latter is even raised to the dignity of a sacrament and of living image of the spousal union with the Church on the cross (Ephesians 5:31-32).

To say that marriage is a sacrament does not only mean -- as often believed -- that in it the union of the sexes is permitted, licit and good, which outside of it would be disorder and sin; it means even more yet, to say that marriage becomes a way of being united to Christ through love of the other, a real path of sanctification.

This positive view is the one that Benedict XVI happily showed in his encyclical "Deus Caritas Est" on love and charity. In it the Pope does not compare the indissoluble union in marriage to another form of erotic love; but presents it as the most mature and perfect form, not only from the Christian, but also from the human point of view.

"It is part of love's growth toward higher levels and inward purification that it now seeks to become definitive, and it does so in a twofold sense: both in the sense of exclusivity (this particular person alone) and in the sense of being 'forever.' Love embraces the whole of existence in each of its dimensions, including the dimension of time. It could hardly be otherwise, since its promise looks toward its definitive goal: love looks to the eternal" (No. 60).

This ideal of conjugal fidelity has never been easy (adultery is a word that resounds ominously even in the Bible!). But today the permissive and hedonist culture in which we live has made it immensely more difficult. The alarming crisis that the institution of marriage is going through in our society is easy for all to see.

Civil laws, such as that in Spain, permit (and indirectly, in this way, encourage!) beginning divorce proceedings just a few months after life in common. Words like: "I am sick of this life," "I'm going," "If it's like this, each one on his own!" are uttered between spouses at the first difficulty.

Let it be said in passing: I believe that Christian spouses should accuse themselves in confession of the simple fact of having uttered one of these words, because the sole fact of saying them is an offense to the unity, and constitutes a dangerous psychological precedent.

In this marriage suffers the common mentality of "use and discard." If a device or tool is in some way damaged or dented, no thought is given to repairing it -- those who did such repairs have disappeared -- there is only thought of replacing it. Applied to marriage, this mentality is deadly.

What can be done to contain this tendency, cause of so much evil for society and so much sadness for children? I have a suggestion: Rediscover the art of repairing!

Replace the "use and discard" mentality with that of "use and repair." Almost no one does repairs now. But if this art of repairing is no longer done for clothes, it must be practiced in marriage. Repair the big tears, and repair them immediately.

St. Paul gave very good counsels in this respect: "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil," "forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other," "Bear one another's burdens" (Ephesians 4:26-27; Colossians 3:13; Galatians 6:2).

What is important is that one must understand that in this process of tears and repairs, of crises and surmounted obstacles, marriage is not exhausted, but is refined and improves. I perceive an analogy between the process that leads to a successful marriage and one that leads to holiness.

In their path toward perfection, the saints often go through the so-called dark night of the senses, in which

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they no longer experience any feeling, or impulse.

They have aridity, are empty, do everything through will power alone and with effort. After this, comes the "dark night of the spirit," in which not only feelings enter into crisis, but also the intelligence and will. There is even doubt that one is on the right road; if it has not all been an error; complete darkness, endless temptations. They go forward only through faith.

Does everything end then? On the contrary! All this was but purification. After they have passed through these crises, the saints realize how much more profound and selfless their love of God now is, in relation to that of the beginning.

For many couples, it will not be difficult to recognize their own experience. They have also frequently gone through the night of the senses in their marriage, in which the latter have no rapture of ecstasy, and if there ever was, it is only a memory of the past. Some also experience the dark night of the spirit, the state in which the profoundest option is in crisis, and it seems that there is no longer anything in common.

If with good will and the help of someone these crises are surmounted, one realizes to what point the impulse and enthusiasm of the first days was but little compared to the stable love and communion matured over the years.

If at first husband and wife loved one another for the satisfaction it gave them, today perhaps they love one another a bit more with a love of tenderness, free of egoism and capable of compassion; they love one another for the things they have gone through and suffered together.

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