

**Reflection on the Gospel-27th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
(Mark 10:2-16)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

The question of gender inclusivity in decision-making has been much in the news of late. The maleness of political and church institutions has been highlighted in my country as a serious contributor to the disorder that finds expression in both bullying and abuse. Since the creation of patriarchy in the Bronze Age, some 3000 years ago, lack of gender inclusivity has posed a challenge, particularly for those who find themselves excluded.

The “test” question about divorce that the Pharisees put to Jesus is very strange in a first century Jewish context, as is the reference to women divorcing their husbands. While there is no evidence that anyone in Jewish circles questioned the legality of divorce, there is plenty of evidence for lively debate concerning the grounds on which a Jewish man could divorce his wife: adultery; inferior cooking; even diminished beauty! There were various schools of thought. Jewish law, unlike Roman law, however, did not permit women to initiate divorce proceedings on any grounds at all. From the perspective of the Markan Jesus, Moses only *permitted* divorce as a concession to “hardness of heart”: it was not so from the beginning. The ideal, he insists, is expressed in the Garden Story of Genesis, the story of “one flesh”, of partnership, of equality and mutuality, of enduring commitment in marriage. The Hebrew word *'ezer* which is translated as “helper” in the first reading from Genesis is used in the Psalms of God’s relationship to Israel. It does not denote inferiority of women to men as is sometimes suggested. A better translation might be “companion”.

Human limitation is just as much a reality now as it was in the ancient world. We strive for the ideal but fall far short of it in so many ways. When this happens in marriage, the consequences can be more far-reaching than in other aspects of our lives. The parties involved become the “little ones” whose lives are shattered and disoriented. The embrace of the community is needed in a particular way for everyone affected by divorce, especially the children. When parents part company, the best interests and needs of the children are sometimes forgotten. Too often, those who have experienced the trauma of divorce feel alienated from the worshipping community, and this at a time when they need the courage to face a different future from the one they had envisaged.

The story about marital commitment leads immediately into a story about Jesus taking the children in his arms and blessing them, despite the disciples’ attempts to send them away. Children are important persons who are never to be excluded from the inner circles of love and compassion. We might hear today’s gospel as a call to be inclusive in all our relationships and to remember the children no matter what happens.