

Section 34
“In the Light of the Word”
Part 3: God’s mercy and the human vocation.

“The word of God is not a series of abstract ideas” (AL 22), Pope Francis states. *“The call and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history”* (AL 31). The Bible consistently uses stories and images to describe God’s mercy and the human vocation in life. Not only the story about the Holy Family of Nazareth *“teaches us the meaning of family life,”* (AL 66), but also other Bible stories, which expose different ways marriages break down, while God remains faithful and merciful.

The second chapter of the book of Genesis opens with painting a fine portrait of the first couple, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. With the Pope, we may say that Adam and Eve represent men and women of every time and place. (See AL 13). Adam feels the solitude amid the world around him and anxiously seeks *“a helper fit for him”* (Gen 2:18). Then, the Creator brings him Eve. The author of Genesis describes God’s original design concerning marriage with the words: *“The man shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one”* (Gen 2:24; AL 12 and 13).

However, *“through sin”* (AL 19), the relationship of love between man and woman turned into a relation of domination. The narrator of the Genesis’ story describes this reality by letting the Lord declare: *“Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you”* (Gen 3:16; AL 19). Afterwards, the Bible frequently offers descriptions of failing marriages and suffering couples. (See AL 20 and 21).

Jesus wants to bring people back to awareness of God’s initial purpose of marriage. He quotes the words of the Genesis’ story: *“The man shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one”* (Gen 2:24; Mat 19:5). In that way, the Pope states, Jesus enlightens the ideal marriage as *“a profound harmony”* and a *“union of hearts and lives”* (AL 13). While speaking in the context of *“a dispute about divorce”*, Jesus makes it clear that according to God’s original design, marriage is not about a man’s rights regarding his wife, but about the union of love between spouses. This communion of love cannot be dissolved by merely human procedures (Mat 19:6; AL 19).

The Pope points out that in his preaching and attitudes, Jesus, on the one hand, clearly *“set forth a demanding ideal,”* while, on the other hand, *“never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of*

individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery” (John 8:1-11; John 4:4-42; AL 38). Consequently, the Pope adds, also for us, “there is a need to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations” (AL 296), Not unlike God’s charity, our charity towards other people should also be, “unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous” (AL 296).

A reflective moment

*“It is a matter of reaching out to everyone,
of needing to help each person
find his or her proper way
of participating in the ecclesial community
and thus to experience being touched
by an “unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous” mercy.*

*No one can be condemned for ever,
because that is not the logic of the Gospel!
Here I am not speaking only
of the divorced and remarried,
but of everyone,
in whatever situation they find themselves.”*

(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* n. 297).