

SoulSpace

THE GOSPEL OF THE FAMILY: JOY FOR THE WORLD

Season colour: **GREEN**

In this series, **Fr Gerard Moloney, C.Ss.R.** anticipates the World Meeting of Families which will take place in Ireland in August 2018.

The hymn speaks of inclusion and togetherness. But while its sentiments are beautiful, not everyone experiences them as true. There are some who, due to personal circumstances, believe they are not welcome in the church. Even when the circumstances aren't entirely of their own making, they feel excluded from full participation in the church. For the divorced and remarried, those who are LGBT, or in irregular unions, the church can seem a cold place. Traditional teaching on marriage and sexuality has made them feel rejected, with the result that, far from feeling welcome, many are alienated from the church and, sadly, don't want anything to do with it.

THE CHALLENGE

In The Joy of Love, Pope Francis makes it clear that no one should feel excluded from God's love. All have a home in the church, he says. All are welcome. The church must help families of every sort, and people in every state of life, know that, even in their imperfections, they are loved by God and can help others experience that love.

It is important then for pastors to assist those whose marriages have faltered and help them feel part of the church community. Francis outlines a process that could lead divorced and civilly remarried Catholics back to the sacraments, and points out that these couples "are not excommunicated and should not be treated as such, since they remain part" of the church (243).

While he upholds traditional teachings on marriage,

Francis is a realist. The church, he says, has often foisted upon people an "artificial theological ideal of marriage" removed from people's everyday lives (36). At times these ideals have been a "tremendous burden" (122).

He cautions against stating that "all those living in any 'irregular situation' are living in a state of mortal sin" (301). People in "irregular situations," or non-traditional families, like single mothers, need to be offered "understanding, comfort and acceptance" (49). As must gay men and women. When it comes to assisting people, the church needs to stop applying moral laws as if they were "stones to throw at a person's life" (305). We must preach the ideal of marriage and family, but always show mercy, taking people's complex situations into account. Individual conscience is paramount and "needs to be incorporated into the church's praxis in certain situations which do not objectively embody our understanding of marriage" (303).

"A big heart" - that must be the church's attitude to all, Francis says, "even those who have made a shipwreck of their lives" (198). ■



"We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them."

Pope Francis, The Joy of Love, 37

The Holy Father



Today's readings

GOD'S WORD TODAY

Ezekial 2:2-5

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Mark 6:1-6

We are presented with two stories of healing today.

Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, approaches Jesus out of desperation as his daughter is dying. He effectively represents Jesus' opposition, but Jesus is also his last hope.

Crowds of people gathered and Jesus' encounter with a woman who was haemorrhaging is one of the most famous in the Gospels. Power left Jesus' body as the woman reached out and touched his cloak. Jesus had an instinctive sense that someone was in need.

Like Jairus, the woman had done everything humanly possible in seeking a cure. Her faith in the power of Jesus stops her haemorrhage and heals her completely. Jesus does not let this moment pass without offering the simple words of encouragement, "your faith has made you well. Go in peace..."

After this brief interlude, we continue on the road to Jairus' house but on arrival Jesus and his followers are told that Jairus' daughter is dead. The crowd gathered at the house laugh at Jesus' statement that she is merely sleeping. Jesus puts them all outside the house as he and his close circle of disciples stay with the child, with Jesus saying the words "Little girl get up". The imagery here is quite stark.

Those who believe are inside the house, those who doubt remain on the outside looking in.



OPEN HOUSE

Pope Francis makes it clear that no one should feel excluded from God's love. All have a home in the church.

"All are welcome" is a popular hymn of recent years. "Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live, a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive... All are welcome in this place."

