



**The Sunday Liturgy Commentary**  
**The 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time – 7<sup>th</sup> October 2018**  
*Lectionary readings: Gen. 2:18-24; Ps. 128:1-6; Heb. 2:9-11; Mark 10:2-16*  
**Theme: Words and Ideals ... not everything is as it seems!**

ἐπηρώτων, in Mark 10:2 is translated in the NRSV as the Pharisees ‘test’ Jesus, but it can also be translated as ‘inquire’. The former suggests a challenging tone whereas the latter encourages curiosity and allows the potential for discussion and new insights for all involved. An example of this latter style of engagement can be found in 10:10 where the same Greek word is translated in the NRSV as ‘asked’, when used of the disciples’ approach to Jesus. If the word were to be translated the same on both occasions then, instead of seeing the Pharisees in a negative light, we might experience more the potential held within their discussion with Jesus.

This one word, ἐπηρώτων, depending on how we translate it, influences our understanding and perception. It can, on the one hand, tap into negative emotions and narrow our view of others and our capacity to hear God’s word (e.g. ‘test’). It can, on the other hand, suggest a relational quality that supports curiosity about others, their thoughts and God’s word in their lives (e.g. ‘asked’). The Catholic Church, for example, invites the latter reading when it states, ‘... Jewish understanding of the Bible can be of assistance in the Christian understanding and study of the Bible. ... ways to study Sacred Scripture together are being developed ... providing occasion to learn from each other ... efforts need to be made to eliminate every form of anti-Semitism. ... we can and should become a source of blessing for each other and the world.’ (Paragraph 55)

In part of our reading from Mark, Jesus turns to scripture to argue against divorce (see Dt. 24:1-4 and Gen. 1:27; 2:24). However, Jesus seems to be presenting an ideal and scripture, in other places, provides us with exceptions (see Mt 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor 7:10-16). Jesus’ prohibition of divorce might have served to ‘protect women from being abandoned without support’ or ‘addressed the situation of those who were separating for celibacy (Mt 19.10-12; Lk 18:29-30; 1 Cor 7.5).’ (Jewish Annotated New Testament, p80) Any one ideal, whether life-long commitment, service or obedience to God’s word can, if not well managed, result in negative consequences such as judgements of others. If well managed however, with a recognition and appreciation of the complexities of being human, ideals can prove supportive and life-giving. The text certainly invites reflection on ideals and our human efforts to achieve them and how we support ourselves and each other when we come face to face with our limitations as we endeavour to reach any ideal.

Hebrews 2:10 mentions being made ‘perfect through sufferings’. How might this speak to our engagement with ideals and our experience of our human limitations? As human beings we suffer, whether our suffering results from our own limitations or from our experiences in life. Suffering can potentially lead to us shutting down and becoming smaller by, for example, judging ourselves and others for not reaching certain ideals. Or, it can widen the space within our hearts, inviting us to rise to the challenge suffering offers for our growth and development by, for example, being compassionate towards ourselves and others when we don’t quite meet the ideals we set ourselves. The Church’s invitation to read the Bible from an open, spacious place within ourselves allows us to use our own suffering to inform our reading of the text.

**For Reflection and Discussion:** [1] How might I support myself further in understanding Biblical texts in light of more recent Church teaching? [2] How might I show myself and others compassion when I’m acutely aware of the complexities and limitations involved in being human and the suffering to which this can give rise?

**Bibliography:** Levine & Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, (Oxford, 2011); Plaut (ed.), *The Torah, A Modern Commentary* (New York, 1981); Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Meditations for Ordinary Time*, (New York, 1984); *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Vatican City, 2008 (Paragraph 55); NRSV.

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