

About the Readings on October 6, 2024

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Sunday, October 2–8

Lectionary 27

Standard Sundays proceed through the Gospel of Mark, this Sunday appointing a passage difficult to hear in our time, which condemns divorce and honors children over adults. We are glad for the welcome that even we receive at the table.



[Genesis 2:18-24](#)

To Christians who are not literalist interpreters of scripture, the Genesis story of the first man and the first woman is a metaphoric tale of God's careful attention to the human species, an indication of the cultural preference for monogamy, and the ethical injunction that sexual intercourse establishes lifelong bonds between the partners. We can honor the ancient story and its religious teachings without suggesting that it is a factual account of the origins of humans.

[The Psalm for the Day](#)

We respond to the first reading from Genesis, the story of the creation of humans, with [Psalm 8](#), which is cited in the second reading from Hebrews. The psalm praises God for the creation of the universe, all the animals, and the especially glorious human species. Because Hebrew was an androcentric language, human beings were spoken of beginning in verse 4 as a single male, "man." This led the author of Hebrews, and the early church, to interpret this "man" as Jesus Christ. Contemporary translators disagree about whether to retain the masculine singular or to render instead the species meaning of the word. In either case, the praise for the earth and its human beings is an appropriate response to the creation story in the first reading.

[Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12](#)

The opening of this reading is also the second reading for Christmas Day. You will need a fine reader to proclaim this syntactically difficult reading, the first of seven semicontinuous selections from the letter to the Hebrews. More than humans, Jesus Christ is the truest heir of God and the reflection of divine glory. Yet we are brothers and sisters of the Son of God.

[Mark 10:2-16](#)

Over the centuries, some Christians have maintained an absolute refusal of divorce or have substituted annulments, which purport that a true marriage never existed, but over the last century many churches, more in keeping with Paul in 1 Corinthians, have come to condone divorce. In either case, the passage proclaims a countercultural belief that marriage partners have been bonded together by God and that Christians have a higher ethical standard than the law stipulates. The reciprocity in verses 11-12 indicates parallel situations of husband and wife. We are so accustomed to the passage about little children that we sometimes miss the shock of its countercultural assertion that God's kingdom belongs to its weakest members.