

## 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Earlier this week Pope Francis announced changes to the annulment process in the Catholic Church. He is not changing church teaching about marriage, but he wants to help divorced people determine more easily if they are eligible for a new marriage in the church. Our diocesan marriage tribunal has not yet sorted through all the implications of the Holy Father's actions, so I do not yet have all the answers to those of you who know a Catholic who is divorced or who have begun annulment proceedings with me at St. Anthony's.

Catholics still believe that marriage is forever. Jesus spoke strongly about this in the gospels: "No one can separate what God has joined." Every Catholic parish including this one has outstanding examples of married couples whose love is strong and who sacrifice for their children. Their commitment to marriage inspires our faith, and we are grateful for the testimony of their lives.

Other couples do not get the same experience. They entered a marriage they intended to last forever, but they were unable to sustain the union, and they divorce. If a marriage does not last forever, it raises the possibility that the couple never had what the church expects marriage to be. To prove that, the church asks for testimony from the couple and from people who knew them at the time of the wedding to help determine what they knew about what they promised on their wedding day. The process is elaborate, lengthy and expensive. While divorced couples are waiting, they either live without a new partner, or they marry outside the church and do not receive communion. Couples sometimes have to wait years for an answer to their request.

Pope Francis established a commission that has now streamlined this process, giving more authority to the local judge. The new rules become effective on December 8 at the beginning of the pope's special Holy Year of Mercy.

I do not yet know how this will change the questionnaires people fill out or the number of witnesses we need. Our diocesan marriage tribunal will keep us informed. I will continue to work with those of you who have begun your cases with me. We should find that the process will be simpler. For example, our tribunal believes that it will now hold competency for the annulment of marriages celebrated in Mexico where the divorced partners now live in two different countries. Divorced persons living here should be able to open their case here.

Pope Francis wants annulments to be free, though he acknowledges that people who work in marriage tribunals deserve a salary. It may be that the contributions we all make to the parish will help defray those expenses.

In today's first reading, we hear the mournful song of a servant who has suffered greatly at the hands of people trying to disgrace him. He knows in his heart what he's done is right, and he believes that God will come to his defense. He says, "If anyone wishes to oppose me, let us appear together" before the court of God. "See, the Lord God is my help; who will prove me wrong?" Many divorced Catholics know in their heart that their first marriage did not live up to the ideals they see in the happy marriages of their friends. Now they may have their inner knowledge confirmed more quickly through the marriage tribunals of the Catholic Church.