

Man, Woman and Love

God created man..., he created man male and female (Gen.1:27)... the man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will be one flesh (Gen 2:24).

In one of the most important dialogues that Plato wrote in his older age-II Convito- he confronted a problem that is among the most complex and among the most profound that can possibly torment man; a problem that touches the very roots of life: the problem of the difference of the sexes and of love.

In this work written some 2300 years ago, the Greek philosopher presents us a fable, a myth, mysterious and yet so lucid; a myth that, even if we have never read the works of Plato, pounds in us every time in life we happen to gaze upon, not in an indifferent way, the eyes of a woman.

Plato therefore recounts that at the origins of time man and woman were not two individuals/personalities divided and distinct; there was one being only, **the being man-woman**, only one organism, only one body as only one soul. It was given to us to daydream about distinguishing marks of this fabulous being: two faces, one of man and the other of woman; two bodies, one feminine and the other masculine, joined, attached, that could walk as it wanted, first in one direction and then in another. And in this duplicity the harmony of the total life was fulfilled. But Jove, one day, from the summit of Mt. Olympus, looked down toward the human beings that were living on the earth. And he saw that they were evil and that the amount of their wickedness was not tolerable. He decided therefore to punish them. And he chose a fatal punishment. He broke off the two parts that were originally one and scattered throughout the world the separate fragments. From that day there were “under the sun” some beings called men and some beings called women.

So from that day what happened? It happened that every time a man and woman meet, a mysterious attraction that we call affection is established between them, and sometimes the attraction is transformed into love and a decision to join forever their own lives. What does such a phenomenon mean? It means this: **that the two parts originally joined are and feel irresistibly attracted to reconstruct the lost unity**. If the affection remains without moving to the level of love, it means that each point of the two beings fit together by chance, but that these two beings are not the two parts of one original being, because the two parts of the being originally one are necessarily unique and not confused or substituted for others, like the distinctive print of the palm of a hand and of its lines is unique and not confused with another man’s hand. If instead between a man and a woman true love is created-deep, total- then it means truly that the two original fragments have met again and that again they are going to build only one life, only one being, only one creature in body and spirit.

This is an ancient Greek fable. If you examine it on the surface you have the immediate impression that you cannot find a more effective and original explanation that will help you to penetrate a word more ancient than Plato, the Word that was in Genesis, the book of Origins. “God created man..., He created him...male and female (Gen. 1:27).” It is not stated that God created man and woman: God created man (adama) and He created male and female. The fundamental essence of our existence is therefore that we do not exist as man or as woman, but as man and woman, two parts of only one being, two fragments of only one creature; and the complete man, the total being, is only in the union of the two fragments. The two fragments are called to fit together, are called to have communion one with the other, to live one for the other, and one from the other.

“Man is not truly man except by means of a woman, and the woman is not truly woman except by means of man and for man.” Therefore: the man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife and they will become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). “Therefore they are no longer two, but one flesh” (Mt. 19:6). Only one flesh: a profound human expression that in the biblical language means only one being, only one life, the total unity of being in the spirit, soul and body.

But the fragments called to form this unity, the “**two**” called no longer to be two, but to become one, **are different**. In the second chapter of Genesis it is written: “**it is not good for man to be alone; I will make for him a help that is suitable for him**”: that is, a being that can be his corresponding one- the other part of himself, **a being different from him**, to whom he is linked and that he links”, who completes him and whom he completes, without whom he cannot be himself, with whom alone he forms the creature. Man by himself “**believes**” himself to be autonomous, to be lord and master of his life: **he needs someone “other” than him to be beside him**. It was very correctly said that the existence of this “other” beside him on the human plane, for him, is a call and a symbol of the existence of an “OTHER” above him on the divine plane. Not by chance have we said that the Platonic myth gives the “impression” of explaining the biblical Word. It is in fact merely an impression, which in a more attentive examination is revealed to be in error. It seems an original commentary: it is in reality a fundamental antithesis.

In the Platonic vision man looks for in the woman his ancient and most profound and most real self: he does not come out of the borders of himself; he does not have an opening toward the “other”. But if I love you because you love me, because you are the fragment perfectly fit together with my fragment, **I DO NOT LOVE YOU. I LOVE IN YOU MYSELF**. I believe that I truly love you, but instead I love me, a “me” made attractive and idealized in you. Love of death, that exhausts itself in oneself, therefore exists in oneself, and does not have and does not want to have a way out of oneself. **It is the fatality of paganism**.

In the myth I am to find the profound reasons for many familiar tragedies and the justifications of many evasions from the matrimonial state. One day it was believed that we could find ourselves in another being, the ideal creature that could reflect ourselves. Then will come the inevitable clash of individuality, because the daily life is not ideal and because it is no small problem, that of the adaptation of two physical and moral beings so developed as a man and a woman who for twenty or thirty years have lived with unique and different habits. The daily life shows that he was deluded and slowly but relentlessly insinuates that the definition of marriage, “falling in love” is just. Then little by little they are detached always more, because the reality always fits together less with the dreamed ideal; he finds himself in front of a limited, relative, defective being that is not, that cannot be the attractive and idealized copy of ourselves. How much more he closes up into himself, and he puts up with the other; the one lives nearby the other, each one to himself; but without marriage, therefore, because marriage is total communion, spiritual and physical, between two beings, the most complete that it is possible to imagine. Or otherwise, the attempt to look for oneself, to find the “twin soul” happens again. In one case like in the other there is adultery, and adultery is a sin against God; because it is an evasion—material or ideal—from the reality that God has given us to live.

What does the Word of God say instead? You have to go out of yourself, to love “the other”, **SINCE HE IS NOT YOU**. With this “other” you have **not** to reconstruct your ancient and fabled **SELF** that existed in an ancient and outmoded golden age, **but to form in the diversity, the only creation that you have received, the vocation of being** in the days that are given you, to live in view of the reign that is coming. Therefore to

accept the “other” as he is, in his relative humanity, defective, not ideal; and decide to live with him, like he is, whatever might come.

It is the conflict of the Christian that announces that the Word of God was made flesh, in a given man, in a given place, in a given historical moment and exclusively in this man, this place, and this date. It is paganism that speaks of IDEAS, a vague world, dreamed and ideal, comparable with other ideas in any place and time.

The love of a Christian, of a man who believes in God made man, Jesus, year One at Bethlehem, is this: **I love you, not because you are beautiful, not because you are intelligent, not because you are the ideal woman; but because you are, completely different from me, and I am deciding to live with you, just like you are, you, not comparable with any other woman, and so one flesh is made between us: only this is love.**

In the Platonic myth I do not go out from myself, therefore I do not love. In the Platonic myth there is identity, therefore solitude, egoism. Here (in the Scriptures) there is no identity; there is communion. Communion between me and a being other than me, to whom I unite myself and with whom I form a unique creature, the person. And therefore, if I am you, we are one, but I have arrived at myself, to my real and complete self, passing through you, like you have arrived to yourself, to your true real and complete self, passing through me. Together we form and have to recreate continually our “self”. Continually because our union is not a permanent adhesion-state of Platonic fragments; it is an act. The act in order to exist must be renewed continually. Therefore marriage is no longer the “tomb of love”. It is the tomb of selfishness that becomes the cradle of love. And the years, instead of diminishing, improve and strengthen and enrich and deepen the love and the union. Is it daring to say that marriage in depth is the foolish attempt to live the Kingdom of God on the earth? The earth, what is it? Egoism. The Kingdom of God, what is it? Communion. Marriage is the attempt and the gift to live already here this communion, of one with an “other” knowing well that it is earthly—“in the resurrection men do not marry and are not given in marriage” (Luke 20:35)—**but at the same time it is a dream of the kingdom that is coming, of the communion of me, I, isolated and egotistical, with an “Other” than me.**

IT IS NOT FOR NOTHING THAT MARRIAGE IS RARE, AS RARE AS FAITH.

(NOTE: Franco Maggiotto, preached this message on the occasion of his 30th anniversary of marriage with Aurora, his beloved wife on the Lord’s Day, February 5, 2006 in the Community at Alpignano, Italy.)