

**Sunday October 7, 2012 – 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Prepared by Liz Mach, Maryknoll lay missionary, Tanzania**

Genesis 2:18-24, Psalms 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6, Hebrews 2:9-11, Mark 10: 2-16

*“This at last is bone of my bones, and flesh from my flesh; this one shall be called woman, for out of man this one was taken.” Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2)*

Today’s readings shout out about right relationships. The meaning goes much deeper than the marriage commitment, much more meaningful than between just two people. It is the commitment that we make for right and just relationships within our families, our communities and even more the relationships we have as a universal church. Together we become one body in right relationship with respect for all if we listen deeply to these readings.

Jesus calls us to honor our call as female, or male, as adult or child. With this call comes the respect for the individual and it reinforces our values of marriage, the single life or a vowed response. We are all called to live in right relationship with each other.

For those of us fortunate to live in mission we experience this right relationship often in the context of culture. And sometimes our gospel values will clash and be in conflict with the cultural values of a people. Years ago we called it enculturation and we tried to be sensitive to those cultural values which formed the societies we are called to live in harmony with in mission and we often did not challenge the customs which we came up against. But what happens when those customs clash with our gospel values today?

An example of this is our work to end Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) here in Tanzania. This harmful traditional practice degrades women, who are placed in marriages (followed soon by pregnancies) at very early ages, which usually ends any educational opportunity for the young woman. FGM is often found in cultures of great poverty, little education and within ethnic groups which devalue the female gender. FGM is often found connected to the spirit world and witchcraft – traditions that are not well understood from the Western Christian tradition. The female child is often not allowed to make her own choice as to whether or not she partakes in this custom. The right relationships as spoken in our readings today are compromised by this tradition.

We are working to give young women the choice to make their own decisions on whether or not to be cut. But it is a cultural value held deeply by elders, the cutters and the girls’ families, and each of these actors benefits more from continuing the custom than the girls themselves. But does this custom value the human rights of the girl? Does the custom bring right relationship to a marriage when she has been violated in such a way? When gospel values of building a just and right relationship contradict the local custom, which do we follow?

We are working as a diocese to hold rescue camps each year for the girls who choose not to participate to come to safety during the 6-8 weeks of the “cutting season.” We have multi-faith seminars of empowerment for church and community leaders. We walk hand in hand with members of other churches and traditions supporting the gathering of elders to bring about change through education and greater understanding of the custom and how it affects a female throughout her life after she has been cut. It can negatively affect her health in childbirth, her sexual relationship, and cause psychological trauma from the cutting. We work with schools and bring greater understanding and clarity for just relationships between male and female. We work for the empowerment of the human being.

Working for just relationships is never easy. Following Jesus can be tough. Seeing a culture through the eyes of Jesus and knowing where He would have made a stand calls each one of us to greater respect for one another. Jesus called the little children to Him in today’s gospel from Mark. More importantly, “He took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them and blessed them.” We also are called and blessed and we go forth to continue to work for a just community in the places where we live and work. We are not alone in this but we have our marriages, our families, our communities and the universal church to accompany us. We make the choice to be part of those communities in right relationships.

**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: Peace, social justice and integrity of creation**

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