

*The Divorced and Remarried  
Challenges and Triumphs  
in Pastoral Care*

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# An Urgent Pastoral Imperative: Papal Words

- Care for Catholics who are separated, divorced, or divorced-and-civilly remarried is a serious pastoral imperative for the Church today.
- Words from recent popes:
  - **Francis:** “Seeing things with the eyes of Christ inspires the Church’s pastoral care for the faithful who are living together, or are only married civilly, or are divorced and remarried” (AL 78).
  - **St. John Paul II:** “The ecclesial community must support such people more than ever. It must give them much respect, solidarity, understanding and practical help, so that they can preserve their fidelity even in their difficult situation ... I earnestly call upon pastors ... to help the divorced, and with solicitous care to make sure that they do not consider themselves as separated from the Church.” (FC 83)
  - **Benedict XVI:** “The Church loves them, but it is important they should see and feel this love. I see here a great task for a parish, a Catholic community, to do whatever is possible to help them to feel loved and accepted, to feel that they are not ‘excluded’ ... so that they see that they are accompanied and guided. ... Their suffering, if truly accepted from within, is a gift to the Church. They need to know this, to realize that this is their way of serving the Church, that they are in the heart of the Church.” (WMF, Milan, 2012)



# An Urgent Pastoral Imperative: What the Statistics Show

- Christ considered every person worth his crucifixion, and so we care for 100 out of 100. But the numbers of those wounded by broken marriages is enormous.
  - In 2018, there were 782,038 new divorces in the US (2.9/1000) compared to 2,132,853 new marriages (6.5/1000). But these statistics do not measure those who stay married or stay single.
  - In 2012, 20.7 percent of Catholics had been divorced – 8.7 percent say they are presently divorced – compared to 26 percent of the general population, but today only 52 percent of adults is married, meaning 28 percent of Catholics who have married have divorced, representing 11 more than 11 million people (compared to 36 percent of all adults, 39 percent of Protestants, 42 percent of those with no religion).
  - 15 percent of Catholics who have divorced have petitioned for an investigation of nullity.
  - In 2013, according to the Vatican's *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae*, 23,302 new petitions for marriage nullity were introduced in the United States and 23,591 marriage nullity processes were completed that year. Among these, a sentence in favor of nullity was found in about 21,079 cases (89.4%).





# An Urgent Pastoral Imperative: Consequences

- Other than the possible death of loved ones, especially children, divorce is the most devastating thing that can happen.
  - The greatest fear of the majority of men is to fail – and it’s easy for them to look at being asked by their wife for a divorce as their biggest failure.
  - The greatest fear of the majority of women is to be alone or abandoned – and that’s what happens when a husband asks for a divorce.
  - The greatest fear for children, after the death of their parents, is for their parents no longer to love each other and them, and divorce plays into that fear and insecurity.
  - They are all among the “walking wounded.”
- At an ecclesial level, the divorced can easily feel alienated, not only from the former spouse but also from God and the Church.
  - Many speak about the shame of feeling like they are wearing a “Scarlet D” when they go to their parishes.
  - Divorce is a common reason why people end up leaving the faith because they no longer think they belong.
  - Sometimes that is based on misconceptions as to they’re being *ipso facto* excommunicated, but also, especially if they have attempted civil remarriage, that they are judged fundamentally as living in sin.



## Outline of this talk

- Scriptural and theological starting points
- Pastoral best practices taken from the experts in the field
- Suggestions for the pastoral care of those who are divorced or divorced-and-remarried





## Scriptural Reminders

- **Genesis 1:26-27** – God said: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.” God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.
- **Deuteronomy 24:1-4** – “When a man, after marrying a woman and having relations with her, is later displeased with her because he finds in her something indecent, and therefore he writes out a bill of divorce and hands it to her, thus dismissing her from his house: if on leaving his house she goes and becomes the wife of another man, and the second husband, too, comes to dislike her and dismisses her from his house by handing her a written bill of divorce; or if this second man who has married her, dies; then her former husband, who dismissed her, may not again take her as his wife after she has become defiled. That would be an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring such guilt upon the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you as a heritage.
- **Malachi 2:16** – “For I hate divorce, says the LORD, the God of Israel”



## Scriptural Reminders

- **Matthew 19:1-11**— “When Jesus finished these words, he left Galilee and went to the district of Judea across the Jordan. Great crowds followed him, and he cured them there. Some Pharisees approached him, and tested him, saying, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?” He said in reply, “Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.” They said to him, “Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss [her]?” He said to them, “Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery.” [His] disciples said to him, “If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” He answered, “Not all can accept [this] word, but only those to whom that is granted.”
- **1 Cor 7:10-14**— To the married, however, I give this instruction (not I, but the Lord): a wife should not separate from her husband, and if she does separate she must either remain single or become reconciled to her husband. And a husband should not divorce his wife.





# Points from the Magisterium On the Evil of Divorce

- “Divorce is an **evil** and the increasing number of divorces is **very troubling**. Hence, our **most important pastoral task with regard to families** is to strengthen their love, helping to heal wounds and working to prevent the spread of this drama of our times.” (AL 246).
- “**troubling sign**” (FC 7)
- “**degrading discrimination**” and “**serious harm**” against women (FC 24)
- “**particularly painful problem**” (B16 7.25.05)
- “**cause of great suffering**” (B16 7.25.05)
- “**grave offense against the natural law.**” (CCC 2384)
- “**does injury to the covenant of salvation**, of which sacramental marriage is the sign” (CCC 2384)
- “**immoral** because it introduces disorder into the family and into society, ... bring[ing] **grave harm** to the deserted spouse, to children traumatized by the separation of their parents and often torn between them, and because of its contagious effect that makes it truly a plague on society” (CCC 2385)





## Points from the Magisterium On the Sad Occasional Necessity

- “If civil divorce remains the only possible way of ensuring certain legal rights, the care of the children, or the protection of inheritance, it can be tolerated and does not constitute a moral offense. (CCC 2383)
- “Respect for one’s own dignity and the good of the children requires not giving in to excessive demands or preventing a grave injustice, violence or chronic ill-treatment. In such cases, separation becomes inevitable. At times it even becomes morally necessary, precisely when it is a matter of removing the more vulnerable spouse or young children from serious injury due to abuse and violence, from humiliation and exploitation, and from disregard and indifference” (AL 241)



## Points from the Magisterium On Pastoral Care

- “The ecclesial community must support such people more than ever.” (FC 83)
- “Make untiring efforts to put at their disposal her means of salvation” (FC 84)
- “Solicitous care to make sure that they do not consider themselves as separated from the Church, for as baptized persons they can, and indeed must, share in her life” (FC 84)
- “The Church loves them, she is not far from them and suffers because of their situation” (JP II to PCF, 1.24.97).
- “Pastors, especially parish priests, must with an open heart guide and support these men and women, making them understand that even when they have broken the marriage bond, they must not despair of the grace of God.” (1.24.97).





## Points from the Magisterium

### Types of Care

- “To welcome them with charity and kindness, helping them to clarify their concrete status by means of enlightened and enlightening pastoral care.” PCF, 1.24.97).
- “Urgently necessary to establish a pastoral plan of preparation and of timely support for couples at the moment of crisis.” ” (JP II to PCF, 1.24.97).
- “Respect, solidarity, understanding and practical help, so that they can preserve their fidelity even in their difficult situation” (FC 83)
- “Cultivate the need to forgive which is inherent in Christian love, and to be ready perhaps to return to their former married life.” (FC 83)
- “They should be encouraged to listen to the word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts in favor of justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace” (FC 84)



# Points from the Magisterium

## Types of Care

- “Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations” (FC 84)
- “Respect needs to be shown especially for the sufferings of those who have unjustly endured separation, divorce or abandonment, or those who have been forced by maltreatment from a husband or a wife to interrupt their life together.” (AL 242)
- “Pastoral care must necessarily include efforts at reconciliation and mediation, through the establishment of specialized counseling centers in dioceses.” (AL 242)
- “Let the Church pray for them, encourage them and show herself a merciful mother, and thus sustain them in faith and hope” (FC 84)
- “She seeks the grace of conversion for them; she encourages them to do good, to take loving care of each other and to serve the community in which they live and work” (AL 78)





## Points from the Magisterium Particular Concern for Children

- “In her motherly love [the Church] is concerned for them as well as for the children of their previous marriage: deprived of their birthright to the presence of both parents, they are the first victims of these painful events.” (JP II to PCF, 1.24.97)
- “Apart from every other consideration, the good of children should be the primary concern, and not overshadowed by any ulterior interest or objective” (AL 245)
- “Christian communities must not abandon divorced parents who have entered a new union, but should include and support them in their efforts to bring up their children” (AL 246).
- “Little ones ... are the ones who suffer the most in these situations. How can we encourage these parents to do everything possible to raise their children in the Christian life, to give them an example of committed and exercised faith, if we keep them at arm’s length from the life of the community, as if they are excommunicated? ... It is important for them to feel the Church as loving mother to all, always ready to listen and to meet.” (Aug 5, 2015 Catechesis).



## Points from the Magisterium

### Holy Communion for Divorced/Remarried

- “The Church reaffirms her practice, based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried [because] ... their state and condition of life objectively contradict that union of love between Christ and the Church which is signified and effected by the Eucharist.” (FC 84)
- “If these people were admitted to the Eucharist, the faithful would be led into error and confusion regarding the Church's teaching about the indissolubility of marriage.” (FC 84)
- “Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance ... can only be granted to those who, repenting of having broken the sign of the Covenant and of fidelity to Christ, are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage. This means, in practice, ... the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples.” (FC 84)
- “By acting in this way, the Church professes her fidelity to Christ and to His truth [and] ... shows motherly concern for these children of hers. ... With firm confidence she believes that those who have rejected the Lord's command and are still living in this state will be able to obtain from God the grace of conversion and salvation, provided that they have persevered in prayer, penance and charity.” (FC 84)





## Points from the Magisterium Holy Communion for Divorced/Remarried

- “The divorced who have entered a new union should be made to feel part of the Church. “They are not excommunicated” and they should not be treated as such, since they remain part of the ecclesial community. These situations “require careful discernment and respectful accompaniment.” (AL 243)
- “Even if these people cannot go to sacramental Communion, they are not excluded from the love of the Church or from the love of Christ. ... Taking part in the Eucharist without Eucharistic Communion is not the same as nothing; it still means being involved in the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. It is still participating in the great Sacrament in its spiritual and pneumatic dimensions, and also in its ecclesial dimension, although this is not strictly sacramental. ... The suffering Christ embraces these people in a special way. ... Even if, unfortunately, a fundamental dimension is absent, they are not excluded from the great mystery of the Eucharist or from the love of Christ who is present in it. (B16 7.25.05)



# Pastoral Best Practices

- Meet those who have been divorced with compassion
  - Many are walking wounded from the various dimensions of the harm.
  - This is involved in the accompaniment.
- Pray for them and let them know.
- Invite them with you to discern their circumstance in God's light.
- Ask how you can support the person.
  - Let the person know you are concerned about his or her pain.
  - Don't say just "How are you?," "How are you doing today?" Rather than saying, "We should get together," say, "Can we get together on Thursday night?" Ask, "Is there anything I can help you with today?"
  - Don't offer unsolicited advice about what you would do in their circumstance.
- Encourage them to consider joining a support group and speak about the benefits. (Gives them something to do, they're able to get practical tips, they know they're not alone).
- Encourage them toward counseling without asking, "Have you tried counseling?," which can make them feel like a failure.





# Pastoral Best Practices

- Present the Truth and Correct Misunderstandings
  - People are not required to remain in marriage at all costs
  - The divorced are able to participate in all aspects of Catholic life (except marriage)
  - The divorced-and-remarried are not excommunicated either. (Rescinded by Paul VI in 1977).
    - The children of divorced-and-remarried can be baptized provided that one parent consents and there's a well-founded hope to raise the child in the faith.
    - They can attend Mass, have children baptized and enrolled in Catholic school or religious education, have a Catholic funeral and be buried in a Catholic cemetery, when in danger of death receive Confession (if repentant) and the Anointing of the Sick, participate in the public spiritual and social life of the parish, but not serve in public ministries or leadership positions,.
  - The difference between a divorce and a declaration of nullity, and the fact that children born of a null marriage are not illegitimate.



## Pastoral Best Practices

- Think about founding a divorced and separated group and ministry.
  - An effective group informs, invites into greater participation in the faith, encourages to healing and connection, affirms people's goodness, listens and tries to reconcile, and prays for and with divorced couples and families.
- Turn them to resources
  - [divorcedcatholic.org](http://divorcedcatholic.org)
  - [NACSDC.org](http://NACSDC.org)
  - [Catholictherapist.org](http://Catholictherapist.org)





## Pastoral Best Practices

- Provide chastity formation
  - Chastity keeps love loving. It's fundamentally a yes, not a no, linked to love, purity and piety.
  - We're dealing not just with fantasy but memory.
  - Help them to grasp the difference between love versus using, self-giving instead of taking.
  - Becoming one flesh with another begins with God's having joined in one flesh
  - Priests and religious show a real example of joyful celibacy, which can give people hope.



# Pastoral Best Practices

- Put the whole question of Holy Communion in a faithful and full context
  - To receive Holy Communion, one must be in sacramental, doctrinal, and moral communion with Jesus (St. Justin Martyr, 165).
  - Divorced-and-remarried people can be made to feel like outliers because, in some places, it seems that everyone else comes no matter what their circumstances: non-Catholics, people who haven't been to Church for years, scandal mongers, abortionists, mafiosi, and others.
- Support faithful spouses
  - Who are giving public example of fidelity to Christ, to children, to former spouse, to whole Church.
  - They're a sign of Christ's faithfulness to each of us.
  - "Their example of fidelity and Christian consistency takes on particular value as a witness before the world and the Church. Here it is even more necessary for the Church to offer continual love and assistance." (FC 83)





# Pastoral Best Practices

## Tips for Those Recently Divorced

- Pray
  - Stations of the Cross (relate sufferings to Jesus and his to this situation)
  - Adoration (one-on-one time with Jesus, helps also with loneliness)
  - Chaplet of Divine Mercy (assists to grow in capacity to forgive and be forgiven)
  - Litany of the Humility (humility is essential for charity and forgiveness)
  - Retreat (allows for a “spiritual makeover”)
  - Prayer of Thanksgiving (Ps 136, Make a list, Remember the grateful leper)
- Remember your Dignity
  - You are not your divorce. You have no Scarlet D. Acknowledge the good in you.
- Journal (especially for women)
  - Name feelings and emotions and what you hope to do about them. This allows you to speak to others and to God about it.



# Pastoral Best Practices

## Tips for Those Recently Divorced

- Change your house around – Like a spring cleaning. Since every room holds a memory, pray in each room for God to redeem the space. Rearrange furniture.
- Deal with the loneliness
  - No human relationship can satisfy the *cor inquietum*. It's important to make the switch from basing life on marriage rather than on spousal communion with Christ. Can't serve two masters.
  - Church doesn't ask you to live as a recluse. Get out of the house. Contact others. Get involved in new activities, like Bible study, an apostolate, teaching CCD.
- Join a Support Group – Recognize you're not alone and learn from practical ways others have met the many struggles and challenges.
- Think about counseling or spiritual direction, for dealing with the wounds, the fears.





# Pastoral Best Practices

## Tips for Those Recently Divorced

- Forgiveness
  - Forgiveness is essential to healing. Forgiveness has physical, spiritual, moral and emotional impacts
  - It's not easy and there are no shortcuts.
  - This is not a one-time action but a continuous process, an ongoing choice.
  - Doesn't mean you let someone off the hook, forget wounds, blindly trust the person, like or become friends again.
  - It's changing the present meaning of past actions.
  - Forgive the intent even if you struggle with the result.
  - The Sacrament of Penance can help, making us “rich in mercy” so that we can share that mercy with others. It helps us to forgive 70x7 wrongs.
  - It's important to distinguish between genuine and false guilt. Genuine is when you've hurt or used someone and rightly regret it. False is when you didn't live up to someone's extrinsic and false standards for you.
  - A “forgiveness trainer” can help.



# Pastoral Best Practices

## Tips for Those Recently Divorced

- Serve Others
  - This takes away the focus on one's pain.
  - One particularly important service is helping to found a divorced support group.
- Surround yourself with bearers of hope. (Christ himself needed Simon and Veronica.)
- Beware of the friends of Job
  - Don't take the counsel of those who encourage you to look at everything in a way contrary to the way of Christ and his Church, who encourage you to date or live promiscuously or harbor grudges.
- Participate as fully as possible in the spiritual and sacramental life of the Church, which may require finding a new parish where you're comfortable.
- Petition for an investigation of the nullity of the marriage sooner rather than later.
  - This allows one to see reasons why the marriage may have broken down.
  - It allows you to work through baggage and pain, bringing it to the surface, to Christ, and to close a chapter.
- Have trust in God that he can draw good out of the evil of divorce and the pain of suffering.





# Pastoral Best Practices

## Tips for Those Recently Divorced

- Help them help their children
  - Parents need to help themselves first if they're going to be able to care for their kids.
  - Children do not get divorced from their parents.
  - Avoid badmouthing the other spouse. Hurting the reputation of the other hurts the child. Don't put the child in the middle.
  - Set the example of finding God in the situation and other health behaviors.
  - Help them find a good structure and routine.
  - Remember holidays.
  - Apologize when needed.



# Prayer to the Holy Family

## Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
in you we contemplate the splendor of true love; to you we turn with trust.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,  
grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer,  
authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic churches.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,  
may families never again experience violence, rejection and division;  
may all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,  
make us once more mindful of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,  
and its beauty in God's plan.*

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
Graciously hear our prayer. Amen.*



# For the Slides of this Talk

You may download a PDF of the PowerPoint slides of this talk and listen to the audio recording by going to:

[www.catholicpreaching.com](http://www.catholicpreaching.com)  
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The screenshot shows the homepage of the website [catholicpreaching.com](http://catholicpreaching.com). The header features a gold cross logo and the text "Catholic Preaching" with "Fr. Roger J. Landry, Diocese of Fall River" underneath. A small photo of Fr. Landry is in the top right. A navigation menu includes Home, Homilies, Articles, Plan of Life Book, Retreats, Teaching, and Biography. A search bar is located below the menu. The main content area begins with a "Welcome!" message from Fr. Landry, followed by a paragraph about his diacal ordination and a quote from Cardinal Edmund Szoka. Below this is a list of "Most Recent Homilies", "Most Recent Articles", and "Most Recent Talks".

Home Homilies Articles Plan of Life Book Retreats Teaching Biography

Search this website ... Search

## Welcome!

I warmly welcome you to this website, put together at the insistence and with the assistance of friends.

During my diacal ordination, Cardinal Edmund Szoka gave me the following instruction from the Ordination Rite as together we gripped the Book of the Gospels:

*"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are.  
Believe what you read.  
Teach what you believe.  
Practice what you teach."*

Those words have never lost their resonance.

Since that day -- October 8, 1998 -- I have tried to live up to that commission to be a "herald of the Gospel," by striving to teach what the Church believes, to practice what I preach to others, and to spread with joy and enthusiasm the truth Christ has entrusted to His church -- in and out of season, in and out of the pulpit.

This website is a chronicle of those attempts.

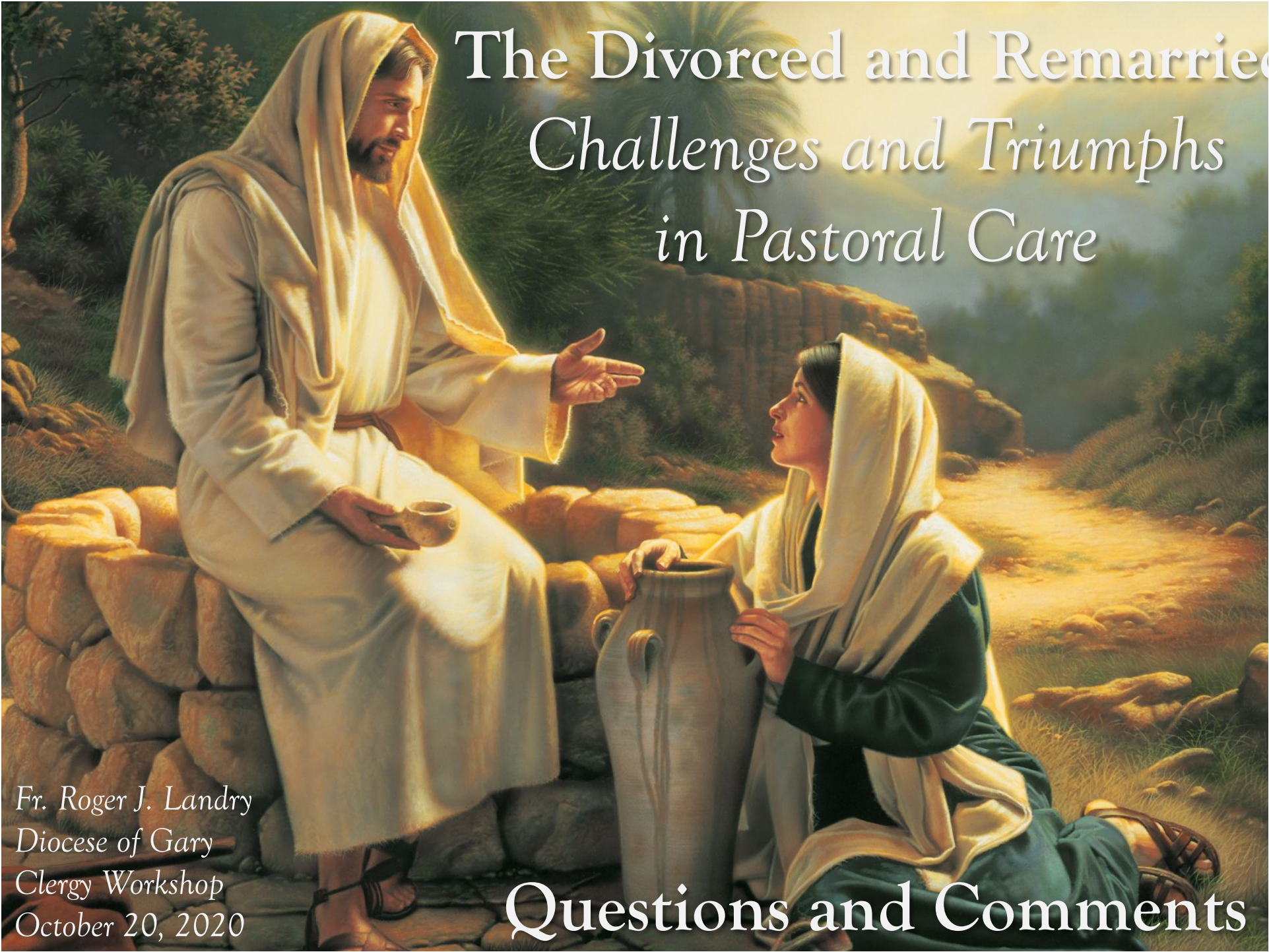
It constitutes the "five loaves and two fish" (or even less!) that I have placed into the hands of the Lord as an attempt to feed a hungry crowd, confident that, if He wishes, He can multiply and supplement that meager offering to nourish many more (Jn 6:1-14).

In Christ,  
Fr. Roger J. Landry

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Most Recent Homilies	Most Recent Articles	Most Recent Talks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Bearing Fruit Attached to the Vine, 12th Wednesday (II), June 27, 2018</li><li>Following the Lead of the Precursor, Solemnity of St. John the Baptist, June 24, 2018</li><li>Placing Our Heart and Treasure in God, 11th Friday (II), June 22, 2018</li><li>Longing to See God's Face in Prayer and in Others, 10th Friday (II), June 15, 2018</li><li>The Surpassing Righteousness of Christ-like Merciful Love, 10th Thursday (II), June 14, 2018</li><li>Greatest in the Kingdom, 10th Wednesday (II), June 13, 2018</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Secular Push to Get Priests to Break the Seal, The Anchor, June 29, 2018</li><li>Approaching the Suicide Surge with Honesty and Resolve, The Anchor, June 15, 2018</li><li>The Abortion Exception to the Practice of Discrimination, The Anchor, June 1, 2018</li><li>The Contemporary Attack on Motherhood, The Anchor, May 18, 2018</li><li>The Euthanasia of Alfie Evans, The Anchor, May 4, 2018</li><li>"Do Not Be Afraid of Holiness," The Anchor, April 20, 2018</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Church and International Diplomacy, Acton University, June 20, 2018</li><li>The Entrepreneurial Vocation, Acton University, June 20, 2018</li><li>The Social Teaching of Pope St. John Paul II, Acton University, June 20, 2018</li><li>The Necessity and Art of Trinitarian Prayer, Catholic Medical Association Boot Camp, June 18, 2018</li><li>Christ, the Redeemer of Marriage: Living and Proclaiming the Gospel of the Sacramentality of Marriage at a Time When Sex, Love,</li></ul>





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Questions and Comments