

Homily 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A) 2026

Of course we would all love to live up to Jesus' command, 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.' However, let's be realistic, we all fall short of anything close to perfect. So, let's explore further the real meaning of this call to 'perfection'. It comes at the end of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount about **loving one's enemies** and going beyond ordinary human standards of love and generosity, a theme constant in the readings from Holy Scripture over the last few weeks. Here, "perfect" translates the Greek **τέλειος (teleios)**, which can mean **complete, mature, whole, or fully developed**. So, the verse is not necessarily saying that Christians must achieve the impossible, but we should simply try to go beyond human standards in our moral life.

We, like our first parents Adam and Eve, struggle in our relationships, give into pride, break our word, fail to give God sufficient time in prayer and worship and generally fall short living up to the high standards set by Christ. Whilst we also demonstrate love of God and love of neighbour our faith lives are at the very least, inconsistent. According to today's First Reading from Genesis for example, Adam and Eve were created to help one another and become 'one body' but they began to act as separate individuals, selfishness and pride leading them to sin.*

Jesus, in today's Gospel from St Mark, seems to judge us harshly when we fall short in the case of divorce, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.' However, unlike St Mark, other Gospels offer some qualifications to this and state, 'except in the case of sexual immorality.' (Mt 19:9). This exception suggests that not all divorces are as 'damning' as we were first thought. So, apart from sexual immorality what other exceptions might there be? Surely one-way consistent physical, emotional and psychological abuse must be another. Women or men, largely the innocent victims of such situations, surely would not be labelled as adulterers by Jesus. Furthermore, men or women, victims of partners who do not take seriously the vows of 'for better for worse, for richer, for poorer' throughout marriage surely would not be judged in such an unfeeling and harsh manner.

As noted earlier, like Adam and Eve, we are all imperfect sinners prone to all sorts of human weaknesses and faults. Whilst accepting this, there are clearly situations in marriage when one partner is the innocent victim of the serious faults of the other. Human courts recognise this reality based on evidence. We should therefore, as a Church and as children of God, be very careful not to 'tar everyone in a divorce situation with the same brush.' At the very least such 'victims' deserve at the a candid discussion with a priest with an open mind and listening ear or are such scenarios even legitimate cases for the 'Internal Forum'? **

How stunningly just that would be!

* Holy Scripture scholar Robert Koch in his 1968 book, 'The Riddle of Genesis' suggests that Genesis 1-11 is not an historical account of the first period of Salvation History. It is a theological account, using Israel's up and down relationship with Yahweh, Near Eastern myth and scientific insight to explain: that God created the world 'good'; for a period humanity lived in union with God; pride and selfishness led to sin and a life of pain and suffering but despite this God continues to be merciful; the sin spread to family (Cain and Abel) to the nation (Noah) and finally to the global community (Babel). In short we were certainly 'made in God's image' BUT much has remained to be done to reach the 'perfection' of his 'likeness'.

** In the Catholic Church, the term "internal forum" refers to the sphere of a person's private conscience and relationship with God, particularly as discerned through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and spiritual direction.

The internal forum in Confession

The clearest example is Sacramental Confession. A person reveals sins to a priest, who acts as minister of the Sacrament of Penance. The priest helps the person examine their conscience, provides counsel and assigns a penance, and—when the necessary conditions are present—grants absolution.

The seal of confession is absolute In; a priest may not disclose what he learns in sacramental confession, even to protect himself or others from consequences.

Internal forum and conscience

The concept is broader than confession. The internal forum can concern matters such as:

- discerning whether one has sinned;
- examining one's moral responsibility in a particular situation;
- spiritual discernment;
- resolving questions of conscience;
- guidance received from a confessor or spiritual director.

However, "internal forum" does not mean that a person or priest can simply decide privately that an objective Church law no longer applies. The internal forum concerns conscience and the person's relationship with God; the external forum concerns facts and rights that can have juridical consequences in the Church.

An important distinction

The phrase "internal forum solution" sometimes appears in discussions of Catholic marriage, particularly concerning Catholics who are divorced and civilly remarried. This is a technically sensitive area: a private judgment in conscience does not ordinarily constitute a declaration of nullity, nor does it replace the canonical process for establishing whether a marriage was valid.