

## No One Is Always Super

**Intro.** It is good to have goals. Some of us have a goal to stay in good physical shape by eating healthy and exercising. But we know it is the rare week or month we achieve that goal. Most of us have a goal of treating our friends well. But we know we screw that up regularly. Many of us have as a goal to keep in touch with God by praying often. That goal is not always attained either. Because we don't always achieve our goals doesn't mean we should quit trying.

**I.** The Pharisees had a goal, even if it was a negative one: to discredit and embarrass the Lord. They already knew the answer before they asked the question. They asked if it was "lawful" for a man to divorce his wife. It *was* in fact lawful. The Pharisees admitted it, saying Moses allowed it. To which the Lord replied that it was because people can be hard of heart. It was a concession to the

spiritual weakness of people [*Sacra Pagina*, Mark, p. 294]. He reminded the Pharisees of God's original plan for men and women: that "as symbolized in the relationship of marriage, human beings were created for one another" [M.McGlone, NCR, 10/21/18]. The Lord's ideas about fidelity and equality were beyond the Pharisees' understanding [M.McGlone, *Ibid*]. Looking around our world, it is obvious we are no longer living in Eden, the perfect place and we are not perfect people. We *are* created for love, joy and happiness, but sin and our own wants mess it up. Marriage today is understood as a covenant relationship, not a contract with all kinds of conditions. Pope Francis is *not* trying to abolish the "law" about divorce and remarriage. He *is* suggesting, instead of ignoring the large number of good people who can't receive Communion, the church must respond by listening to people's stories of struggle and pain and offer help in finding a way

back to the sacraments. That seems to me like a good goal for the community we call church.

**Concl.** Goals encourage us to work hard, to stretch ourselves, to achieve what we didn't think possible. Failure is part of life, but is not a reason to quit trying. Our retreat master talked about how priests sometimes *feel* like we are Superman and that sometimes parishioners try to *make* us like Superman. I think sometimes children believe *parents* are Wonder Woman or Superman, able to get them to all practices in a single bound and still serve a delicious dinner. Parents can think their *children* are Supergirl or Superboy as well. It's impossible; none of us are super. Our retreat master asked us if we knew, besides his super powers, one of the other things about Superman that intrigues us. He has a weakness: [wait] Kryptonite. He is vulnerable. He is made weak by a mysterious green substance from his home planet no less! In that, our

retreat master said we can recognize ourselves. We can be strong *and* we can be weak and vulnerable to failure. It is good to know what *our* "Kryptonite" is and avoid it. The Lord proposes strong goals for his followers. We struggle to achieve them. Our church struggles to achieve them. But God gives us strength, grace and the *power* of the sacraments of Baptism, Communion, Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders and Anointing.

Reconciliation/Confession is a *special* antidote to whatever kryptonite we have stumbled on.

**Forgiveness and grace are what we need when we are weak and vulnerable, not judgment.**

Fr. Michael Pendergraft

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