

There are roughly 206 bones in the human body.

Not that I've counted them all. And I say 'roughly' because a newborn has over 270 bones some of which fuse together as they grow up. And as we all get older, some of our smaller bones may, through injury or stress, fuse together - making us a bit stiffer and less flexible.

The largest bone in the body is the *femur* or thigh bone ... reaching upwards of 19" in length. And the *stapes* - one of the small bones in the inner ear, which is shaped like a tiny stirrup - is the smallest bone in the body measuring-in at one-tenth of an inch.

This time of year, we sometimes see skeletons depicted for Halloween decorations, or perhaps for All Soul's Day or Day of the Dead celebrations - depending on your particular cultural background.

Bones can be categorized and organized by their shape - such as: long, short, flat, irregular; or their location - like: cranial, facial, thoracic, carpal, and tarsal.

Personally, I've broken my clavicle (the collarbone), one of the carpal bones (in my wrist), and one of my metatarsal bones (in my foot.) I may have fractured a phalange or two - that is, when I stubbed a toe, or jammed a finger.

If a person breaks a larger bone, they may need to have a pin or a screw put in surgically to hold things together and help it heal. For others, if a hip or a knee or a shoulder wears out - they can get a titanium replacement put in as well.

And just for the record - teeth are not bones. Bones have marrow; and bones can grow and heal - whereas teeth cannot ... which is why we have dentists and fillings ... and root canals.

Today's readings all seem to focus in some way on family - husbands, wives, children, and siblings.

Marriages in the ancient world were big deals - primarily as a way to survive in a hostile world - whether against the forces of nature or the forces of other tribes and nations. Not to mention in bringing up children for the continuation of the human race ... the propagation of the species, so to speak ... as well as the family name.

In our own day and age, marriage has somewhat devolved in the minds of many into nothing more than a legal contract - as a way to dictate inheritance rights and visitation rights and how to apply the tax code for couples.

But from a spiritual perspective, marriage is much, much more than a contract.

In Genesis, after Adam had named all the animals - and I want to point out that there are over 60,000 animal species on our planet - and 20 times that when you add in insects, bugs, and all the slimy things in the oceans ... so Adam's naming of

all the animals was less an afternoon's event, and an awful lot more like a serious research project - maybe taking several months or years.

But after all of that research ... and after all of that work, "*none [of the animals] proved to be [a] suitable partner for*" him.

And we all know the rest of the story - which culminates in Adam's recognition that Eve was "*at last ... bone of [his] bones and flesh of [his] flesh*".

This language, "*bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*" is the language of a covenant. And while sparing you the detailed theological and philosophical nitty-gritty of the difference between contracts and covenants ... a nutshell explanation is that a contract is an exchange of goods and services; while a covenant is an exchange of persons - a gift of our very selves.

That is why when Jesus Christ gave His life for us on the Cross ... Saint Paul can say in Ephesians 5 that the Church is the Bride of Christ, and that Jesus is the Bridegroom. Saint Paul goes on to call this cosmic marriage a "*great mystery*" ... something that is not easily understood ... nor easily defined.

That is why in the Gospel we hear, "*what God has joined together, no human being must separate*". A Church annulment is far from being a legal divorce - rather an annulment looks to see if there was something held back ... some failure to complete the full exchange of persons ... resulting in an incomplete gift of selves ... an impediment, as it is said, to the great mystery of this covenant of matrimony.

And it is also why the bishops of the Church oppose the efforts by the state to re-define marriage as a collection of legal fictions ... in a sense cheapening the great mystery of a covenant ... and re-defining it to suit current social trends.

The great mystery of covenants applies as well to all the Sacraments - in Baptism we are given to God as children - becoming sons and daughters of God; in Confirmation we are given the Holy Spirit to strengthen us for our mission - so that we might bring the Spirit of God into the world. In the Eucharist, we are given the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ - as spiritual nourishment for our daily life ... and to renew, at least weekly, our covenant with God.

In all of the Sacraments - covenants are made and renewed; strengthened and restored ... persons are given to one another ... persons both human and Divine ... and in this way, we imitate and live out the life of the Trinity - in whose image and likeness we are created.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ - let us pray that the graces of this Most Blessed Sacrament might strengthen the bonds of all of our covenants - with God and with others - so that we might ... as bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh ... live more deeply the great mystery ... giving ourselves more fully ... to God ... and to one another.