

Reflection for Aug. 14, 2020

Ezekiel 16:59-63

Matthew 19:3-12

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Yesterday the Gospel urged forgiveness. Today we are reminded why. In our Scriptures, we hear of hopes and dashed dreams, of God's fidelity and of human limitations. It's all about relationships.

A therapist, Rick Hanson, writes, "Our relationships give us most of our joys and most of our sorrows." Isn't that true? Ezekiel suggests that even God shares this experience. While naming its infidelity, God yearns and hopes that Israel will have a change of heart.

On our part, we are quite aware of some basic characteristics of being human namely, being fallible, mortal and limited. Yet aren't we still surprised or irritated when those very characteristics show up in our everyday interactions? How dare those people be so ... fallible, limited and even mortal? Somehow, God thought it was just fine for us to be limited in these ways. So maybe this is *precisely* how we come into grace and *help one another* find our way on the journey.

The Gospel today points to this understanding, though not at first hearing. Let me share an experience.

Some years back, as a clinical social worker, I worked with people on issues toward healthier outcomes. It was in a parish setting. One Sunday, we had this same Gospel as today. After Mass, I was in the back of church greeting people, when one couple came up to me with faces full of *pain* and *tears* in their eyes. I knew their stories. Each had endured through a difficult marriage and a painful divorce. Years later, they found each other and decided to take the *risk of trusting* that they could make a new start and build a healthy relationship.

Then, they heard this Gospel. Their faces and gestures said, "How can we follow what we truly believe is a *blessed* hope for our future, and reconcile with this passage?" (Eventually, with prayer, honesty and guidance they did work it out.)

Let's gain insight into this Gospel with the assistance of the *Interpreters Study Bible*. It says: "The Pharisees test Jesus to *support* conventional patriarchal marriage in which the husband *rules* over his wife. Jesus *resists* the patriarchal patterns of male rule, by teaching more *egalitarian* relationships appropriate to God's empire ... The Creator's view ... (of) one-flesh relationships, is countercultural in emphasizing *mutuality and equality*."

The commentator further notes: "Jesus restricts male-initiated divorce to one situation. (The term can be translated 'unlawful' or 'unchastity' or 'adultery'.) Jesus strictly limits

male power, but risks trapping people in loveless relationships since he does not mention (at that time) the role of mercy in enabling a new start.”

Moving on to our *present* time, let’s listen to Cardinal Blasé Cupich of Chicago. He reflects on the wisdom he has gained in his 45 years as a priest enriched by the witness of countless married couples. He counsels us to “pay attention to the real everyday experiences of people. For it is in these experiences that they encounter Jesus, the Messiah, who *knows* suffering, who is *honest* about human limitations and only wants us to be *true* and *real*.” He continues, “I am convinced that now more than ever, the Church’s leaders need to return to this school of acquired wisdom, to mature in *their* faith by paying attention to the real–life experiences of (people.)

“This wisdom teaches us to *be honest* about the human condition, human mistakes and human frailty. It is a wisdom that knows the power of *candor* in facing issues head on, confident that Jesus will not abandon us, for he has traveled on that very same way, the way of the cross.” GUTD, p. 155

Consider your own experiences. This wisdom applies to *every* relationship we have ...

As we journey forward in life, whether single, married, or vowed, we ALL are called to grow in grace *through* the daily experience of human *interactions*. Remember, the call is to be true, be real and be wholeheartedly *human*, even fallible, limited and mortal.

After all, God has made us this way and in fact, God said, “It’s ALL good.”