

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I

Genesis 2:18-24

The LORD God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him."
So the LORD God formed out of the ground various wild animals and various birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each of them would be its name.
The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all wild animals; but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man.

So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The LORD God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man.

When he brought her to the man, the man said:

"This one, at last, is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called 'woman,'
for out of 'her man' this one has been taken."

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6

R. (cf. 5) May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.

Blessed are you who fear the LORD,
who walk in his ways!

For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork;
blessed shall you be, and favored.

R. May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
in the recesses of your home;
your children like olive plants
around your table.

R. May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.

Behold, thus is the man blessed
who fears the LORD.
The LORD bless you from Zion:
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.

R. May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.

May you see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel!

R. May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.

Reading II

Hebrews 2:9-11

Brothers and sisters:
He "for a little while" was made "lower than the angels, "
that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting that he,
for whom and through whom all things exist,
in bringing many children to glory,
should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering.
He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated
all have one origin.
Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them "brothers."

Alleluia

1 John 4:12

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

If we love one another, God remains in us
and his love is brought to perfection in us.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 10:2-16 or 10:2-12

The Pharisees approached Jesus and asked,
"Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?"
They were testing him.
He said to them in reply, "What did Moses command you?"
They replied,
"Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce
and dismiss her."
But Jesus told them,
"Because of the hardness of your hearts
he wrote you this commandment.
But from the beginning of creation, *God made them male and female.
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."
In the house the disciples again questioned Jesus about this.
He said to them,
"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another
commits adultery against her;
and if she divorces her husband and marries another,
she commits adultery."

And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them,
but the disciples rebuked them.
When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them,
"Let the children come to me;
do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to
such as these.
Amen, I say to you,
whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child
will not enter it."
Then he embraced them and blessed them,
placing his hands on them.

Exegesis

Genesis 2:18-24

Our Gospel passage today is taken from what is sometimes referred to as the second creation story in Genesis. It comes from the Priestly Tradition. Yahweh had just formed man from the clay of the earth: “the Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being.” (Gen 2:7) God then placed the man in the Garden of Eden. From the same ground God then created plant and vegetation including the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

As our pericope begins God states that it is not good for man to be alone and so God formed, also from the ground, animal life and gave man dominion over them. But there was no suitable partner for man and so God formed woman to be man’s partner. Now instead of forming woman from the clay of the ground, God formed woman from the side of man. Man and woman were literally one flesh. And so, marriage, a union of one man and one woman is a part of God’s creation.

As a salmon inexorably returns to the stream from which it was born, the human soul seeks its origin. There is a natural desire for man and woman to become united as one flesh, a state of being from which they once originated. Ultimately that natural desire to return to the original state of being is, of course, to return to union with God.

This primordial state of being precedes the Fall of Man. With the Fall comes sin and death, i.e., separation from God. With the Fall separation consciousness enters the human condition. Separation from the primordial state of union with God and creation results in the feeling alienation from God and the desire to be re-united. \

Psalms 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6

Psalms 128 is a short song of only 6 verses. It is entitled *The Happy home of the Just*. The Psalm begins with the Hebrew word *asre* which is translated as *blessed* in some translations and as *happy* in other translations. The word seems to follow the same deep sense of bliss or profound inner joy that is expressed by the Greek word *markarios* which is also translated as *blessed* which is pronounced *ble-said*. It too describes an inner joy of the soul that has God as its source, i.e. one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. *Markarios* is the word used by Jesus in the Beatitudes to describe this state of being.

Blessed are you who fear the Lord. The Hebrew word that we translate as *fear* is *yare*. Although it can mean fear as we think of it, i.e. craven fear, it is most often in man’s relationship to God expressing a connotation of deep reverence, awe, and respect. It describes the proper relationship between creature and his creator.

This just and righteous relationship with God blesses one with great family relationships. The Psalm describes a loving home, with a loving husband and wife surrounded by children and grandchildren. The psalmist celebrates a deep peace that permeates the home living in just and righteous vertical and horizontal relationships.

Exegesis (Continued)

Hebrews 2:9-11

Our passage from *Hebrews* is taken from a section that is entitled *Exaltation through Abasement*, which includes *Hebrews* 2:5-18. In verses 2:6-8 *Hebrews* quotes Psalm 8:6-7: “What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him? You have made him for a little while lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor subjecting all thing under his feet.”

Later in verse 9 *Hebrews* speaks specifically of Jesus who was crowned with glory and honor because He was for a little while made lower than the angels and suffered death. Whereas it would be natural to understand *a little while* as the temporal life of Jesus in human form on earth its connotation in the original Greek is more one of degree, i.e., the human condition is a little degree below the state of the angel. Both are created beings, but angels are not subject to mortality. The point is that Jesus entered into the human condition and subjected Himself to death, even death on a Cross.

In verse 10 it would seem that the pronoun *he* is referring to God the Father in that *he* should make the leader of salvation (Jesus) perfect through suffering. It was God who breathed His life breath into the clay of the ground in the creation story, and so man became a living being. John, in his prologue, reveals that it is the Eternal Word, i.e. Jesus, through whom all things came into being. Jesus and the Father are one. So, we can say that God humbled Himself to share in our humanity, and that God died on the Cross for our sins. He subjected Himself to be little less than the angels to suffer death for us.

Hebrews states that Jesus was perfected in His suffering. The etymology of the word that we translate as *perfected* connotes an understanding of someone or something realizing the purpose for which it was created. In other words, God subjected Himself to a state of being lower than the angels for the purpose of dying our death in expiation for our sins.

St. Paul sums up beautifully this passage in *Philippians* Chapter 2: “Jesus, who though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found in human appearance, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted Him...”

Exegesis (Continued)

Mark 10:2-16

Our passage from the *Gospel of Mark* includes a section entitled *Marriage and Divorce* and a section titled *Blessing of the Children*. As the Holy Spirit presents these two sections together for us this Sunday it may be wise to analyze them in relation to each other. Both sections speak of relationships. The first section exemplifies for us a deep horizontal personal relationship where two human beings, man and woman, can become as one flesh in a deep bond of love. The second section portrays more of a vertical relationship between a child and God, his/her creator. Jesus, in both pericopes, is highlighting the relationship between being and source of being. Man and woman were once one flesh as woman was formed from the rib of Adam and they seek union (re-union) with each other. The child was formed from the breath of God and the two also seek union (re-union) with each other. We seek union with God and God desires to be one with us in a bond of love. Love seeks union.

Our Gospel setting today is a continuation of the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem where He is resolutely determined to travel. Our selected passage follows His second prediction of His Passion and immediately precedes the third and final prediction of His Passion. As Jesus taught the crowds, the Pharisees approached to test Him, trying to trip Him up. When Jesus asked them what Moses said on the matter of divorce, they immediately referred to Deut 24:1-4 proving that they already knew the answer as revealed in Sacred Scripture. They were not looking for an answer to their question. They were looking for a cause to put Him to death.

For an in-depth discussion on Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce especially in the context of first century Palestine and the Greco-Roman world, see the works of Donahue and Harrington in the *Sacra Pagina Series – The Gospel of Mark*. They offer an extremely detailed analysis with great historical references.

Jesus takes them (and us) deeper to a place before the Fall, before man's hardness of heart existed. In the beginning of creation, before the Fall, there was no separation consciousness in the human experience. The Garden of Eden was a place of only unitive consciousness. There was once a oneness within God and between God and creation. It was man's choice to turn away from God because of his God given free will, and so separation (divorce) became a part of the human condition. It was God, who is love, who created man and women to be one flesh in a union of love. The marriage covenant is an icon of God's unitive love here on earth. God is the source of that love and that union. "Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate." (Mk 10:9).

The people were bringing children to Jesus that He might touch them, and the disciples were trying to prevent them. Jesus rebuked them and told them that the Kingdom of God belongs to such as them. On display once again is a separation consciousness. The disciples are trying to prevent the children from connecting with their creator. This time it is a vertical disconnect, i.e., between God and child of God. Children are innocent and remain close to God. They have not lived a life of separation consciousness. They have not yet developed hardness of heart. "Then He embraced and blessed them, placing His hands on them." The human soul has returned to its source, to a primordial state of being, in the arms of God.

Reflection

It would be easy today to focus on the surface of the readings this weekend. In prayer I was called much deeper. As human beings we were created in the image and likeness of God. God is a union of three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God consists of three distinct persons yet is profoundly one. God is love. Love is the power of unity by which God is one. In our readings this week I think that the child represents the vertical bond of love between creator and creature, between life and the source of life. The marriage covenant represents the horizontal bond of love between persons.

The marriage covenant is often portrayed in Sacred Scripture as an icon or a symbol of God's profound love for us. We hear of a God who wants to espouse His people. We hear of a God who wants to be in this profound personal relationship with each one of us. Jesus reveals Himself throughout the Gospels as the bridegroom who seeks to espouse His bride, His Church. At the Last Supper Jesus prayed, "Father may they be one as You and I are one."

The contrast between this profound union of love is separation. Divorce is the image of separation consciousness, i.e. the breaks of the bond of love where two that once were one flesh become two again. Rejecting the child is similarly representing a disconnect, a separation of creature from the creator. Jesus came into our world to restore the alienation caused by sin. He came into our world to restore the original harmony disrupted by the event that we call original sin.

To restore the brokenness of the world Jesus had to enter into it. He had to become one of us, in solidarity with us. Jesus traveled to the depth of separation from His Father's love. The real Passion was the sorrow of His soul, "My soul is sorrowful unto death." (Mt. 26:38) From the Cross Jesus cried out, "My God, My God why have you forsaken Me.?" (Mt. 27:46). Jesus had to experience real death, which is separation from the source of life which is the Father's love. The pain of this separation, the separation from infinite love, is the real Passion of our Lord. Jesus had to go there to reverse the sin of Adam. He had to become the new Adam to reverse and restore the original unity of creation.

As the Body of Christ here on earth we must be about the mission of restoring the brokenness of our world. Last week we were challenged by the Word of God to remove any obstacles that separate us from God. We were challenged to restore our own vertical relationship with the source of life, the ground of our being. Now we are being challenged to restore the horizontal relationships of our lives. That restoration should begin with those who are closest to us and extend out from there. I see the mission of our parish communities to continue to support and strengthen family life. We first experience God's love from our parents and we first learn to love in a family of love. We must be that family of love as a parish, God's family.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle within us the fire of Your love. Amen.

In Christ,



Personal Witness

It was a viciously cold Sunday evening in January. I was 7 years old. I was at my maternal grandparent's home for dinner. I was in the barn "helping" my grandpa with the evening milking. After I had distributed rations of hay and oats to the cows my grandpa sent me back to the house as he was finishing up. The walk to the house was about 100 yards. The farmhouse and barn were built on the highest elevation in the county. There was no earthly light except the dim light from the farmhouse window in front of me and the barn windows behind me. On this bitter clear and cold evening, the sky was alive with billions of stars and galaxies that I could see in every direction.

I remember vividly standing in the freezing cold for the longest time staring at the sky above and all around me. I felt at that moment a profound union with God with all His creation. I was overwhelmed with the warmth of God's love, such that it still moves me 65 years later. Thirty-five years later sitting in a seminary classroom I heard for the first time Paul Tillich's definition of love. He said that love is the power that drives every thing there is toward every thing else there is. I immediately was drawn back to that childhood experience when I first experienced that profound unitive power.

I was then drawn to the large crucifix that was hanging on the wall of the seminary classroom. The power of love flows from the cross. The power of God's love and the perfect human response to that love intersect at the Cross. The vertical beam of the Cross represents that connection between God and all of humanity. God's love is pouring into the world in and through Jesus, and from His pierced side flowing lavishly and indiscriminately out into humanity. With arms outstretched Jesus is embracing and drawing all of humanity to Himself. The horizontal beam represents the horizontal flow of love from God through Jesus and then through a chain of human connectedness, a chain of love made possible by the Cross and the entire Paschal Mystery.

God is love. We were created in the image and likeness of God. The power of love is drawing us back to our original state of being, a primordial existence disrupted by man's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. There is an inexorable drive in the human soul to return to this state of blessedness. St. Augustine expressed it beautifully in the first paragraph of his famous book *The Confessions* when he wrote: "You created us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." This natural desire or yearning for God can be articulated expressing a variety of hungers of the soul. Some of those inner desires manifest themselves in our yearning for love, for happiness and joy, for life and life eternal, or for a peace that the world cannot give. Whatever hunger we are feeling, at its deepest level it is the same. It is an insatiable desire, shared by every human being, to return to our primordial state, a child in the arms of God.

