

There is a strong linkage between our gospel reading this morning and what we find in the Old Testament book of Genesis, in the second chapter. The Genesis story is from the ancient Hebrew myth of creation. It seeks to explain human sexuality and the bond between mates. It is a powerful and compelling bond, and the story is well worth reading if you are not familiar with it. In short, it tells us that God created male and female to be mates for each other.

Mark tells us, in his gospel, that Jesus believed that this bonding ought to be permanent and irrevocable. For the record, Luke's gospel agrees with Mark's. I find it interesting that apparently this absolute prohibition of divorce was too difficult and too inflexible for Christians in the early church. Matthew's gospel waters the Lord's teaching down, by telling us that divorce is permissible if your spouse has been adulterous, and Saint Paul tells us you can get out of the marriage if your spouse is not a Christian, providing the spouse agrees to the divorce. The various denominations have their own rules or canon law about divorce. Clearly, some are more liberal than others, or perhaps more pragmatic.

When we get beyond the legalities and the inflexibility of rules, I think that what these readings really tell us is that relationships are crucial for spiritual health, as well as our emotional well being and even our physical well being. I think that the gospel reading, as well as the teaching in Genesis, also tell us that we are bound to God in our relationships. This is not just true of relationships between marriage partners, but also between parents and children, siblings, friends and neighbors. God's wish for humanity is that we be able to get along, that we support one another, that we bring out the good in each other by seeking to find the image of God in each other. All humanity is part of the same family of God, and God's will for us is that we live in harmony, that Christ's peace reigns in our hearts.

I think that God suffers over our brokenness. A very powerful image for me is that of the weeping Jesus. I see Jesus down on his knee, his face buried in his hands, weeping over me and my failures, because his love for me and his sacrifice for me has not been enough for me to love him and others as he loves me. This image calls me up short and tells me that I must try harder, that I am not serious enough about my Christianity because I am my brother's keeper. I have God-given responsibility for the well being of those with whom I relate. I cannot transfer the blame to others for my anger and hatred. As a Christian, I do not have this right.

This must be so for all of us. We must find the reality of ourselves in the image of the weeping Jesus. He cries for us, because we are broken. If we are Christians, we are

bound to imitate Christ and the imitation of Christ is the imitation of his love, and his love is forgiving of all things and his love is unconditional. Brokenness in families is a reflection of sin, a reflection of selfishness, jealousy and pride. The same is true for communities, races and nations. It is especially true for the church of Jesus Christ. The church should be the perfect model of God's harmony and I think that its failure must grieve Christ the most.

Where does this leave us? It, hopefully, leaves each of us with the realization that God calls us up higher than we are. In our marriages, in the relationships of our daily lives, in our working, in our playing, in our business and in our politics, we are called to do more, to try harder to truly be instruments of God's peace. I sometimes refer to Saint Francis of Assisi as a good person to look to if we want to know how to live as an icon of Jesus. Francis was an excellent model of Christ's love and his peace. Francis gave us a prayer that should be familiar to all of us, a prayer that we would do well to pray daily.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. *Amen.*