

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jun 16th 2013

PRE-PRAYERING

There are various forms of conversations which we have in our ordinary days. We can have “adult”, “business”, “romantic”, “casual”, or “argumentative” interactions all within one day.

We can have the same kinds of conversations with life and with God as well. The Eucharistic liturgy is a form of conversing in which Jesus continues a divine and never-ending relational interchange with us, but we come to the liturgy in various modes of communication. We can prepare for each liturgy by our being attentive to the ways we have been conversing with others, with God, and with ourselves between liturgies. We can check how we have been listening and speaking in these important areas of our lives. Arguing, pouting, romanticizing and shutting down are all forms of our not desiring or entering into real relating. We prepare for our attending to Jesus’ being the Word of Life, by our being attentive to the way we converse with life.

REFLECTION

King David had sexual intercourse with Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba and she became pregnant. To cover up his sin, he had Bathsheba sent to lie with her husband who was fighting for Israel. He refused to have intimacy with her as long as he was with his troops. So David had Uriah hung out to dry by having him in the front lines and then having the rest of the troops fall back leaving Uriah to be killed.

This sounds like quite a modern script. What we hear in the First Reading for this liturgy is the narrative of Nathan’s prophetic word to David from God. Nathan relates all that God has done for David and given to him, yet this was not enough. God says that David, in lust and even more in greed, took what was not his, what was not given to him by God. David took Uriah’s wife and Uriah’s life. It is all very clear.

David replies humbly and simply that he indeed has sinned.

In response to this admission Nathan has one more thing to say from God. “The Lord has forgiven your sin, you shall not die.” It is all very clear, but not quite. What about justice! What David did was terrible!

The Gospel has two distinct parts. The first is set in a dinner party. Simon, righteous as God, invites Jesus, but to be roasted rather than toasted. Simon the Pharisee does not extend the usual mannerly welcome to Jesus. Jesus in turn does His usual welcome to a woman of “her kind”.

For a woman, whom it is assumed, is a public sinner enters the scene and wordlessly welcomes Jesus with signs of tender and gentle care. They are attracted to each other: she for his reputation of kindness, and he for her reputation of injured violation.

Simon is not attracted to either and murmurs to himself. Jesus offers Simon a little story to demonstrate

what exactly is going on here. Then Jesus sends her away, not banishing or dismissing, but returning her to her dignity by being forgiven for whom ever she had been in the past. He sends her back to living without regret or shame. Of course the others at the table want to shout out about “justice!” but they murmur and question, which is in fact an affirmation about who this is who forgives sin.

The second section of today’s Gospel is about a group of women who follow Jesus and who take good care of him and the apostles. These women, as with the woman of the first section of this narrative, were cured of body and spirit. These two different sections are about Jesus and women.

I am going out on a limb with what I offer now. Here at our University it is well documented that more women students attend retreats, receive spiritual direction, and join groups who say the rosary and adoration groups as well as assist at the Eucharist. This is not unique to our campus. I have just started climbing further out on the slippery limb.

I am a male who is envious of many aspects of the female gender. Women have a deep longing for belonging. Relating, sharing, receiving, cherishing, and holding sacred all seem to them as natural as breathing. Yes, injuries can disturb these sensitivities, but women seem to know the importance for living of these awarenesses.

Men hold sacred other awarenesses, that is very true and they are good ones as well. I do not have to explain them: not to women who know them well, nor to men who display them when they eventually learn them. Men want to fix, be important for what they do, and get on to the next “town and village” as did Jesus after leaving Simon and his dinner guests still murmuring.

Jesus seems more attractive to women than to men, because they seem to receive his ways of dealing with human frailty better than we men. We like to do our own fixing of ourselves, thank you, and then have Jesus approve the project. Women journey in today’s Gospel. Women journey more deeply and long for the depth of the relationship, even with mystery. Women seem to deal more gracefully with mystery, the unknown. Men tend to put their nickel down when we see the completion, the outcome. Yes, it is true that men like to gamble more than women. The men have a sense that they have figured it out, whether it be the stock market or the basketball game or horse racing.

Simon and his male guests have Jesus figured out and so does this woman who is available for the mystery of her being forgiven and released for deeper living. I am way out in the leaves of the limb now. Perhaps these readings today are about Jesus’ dealing with women, and how receptive they are to his relating with them, not just healing, but inviting them to life. Jesus is also dealing with us men, inviting us to let go of murmuring, fixing, and our projects. We tend to demand “justice” rather than receive mercy, in regard to ourselves as well as others. We all are the woman and the Pharisee and Jesus doesn’t shout anything at us, but sends us out to live more deeply.

“There is one thing I ask of the Lord, only this do I seek: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life:

Larry Gillick, S.J.