

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Mar 14th 2015

We are well into Lent, the third week already. Today we are offered a path of love, not sacrifice, to nurture our relationship with God. We find it in both the First Reading and repeated in the Responsorial Psalm.

This is good news, as long as we are willing to believe it and fashion our behaviors in response. Herein lies the rub, perhaps. Surely God wants great sacrifices from me in reparation for MY sins, I've sinned so well, don't you know. It can feel a bit complacent to just lean back and accept God's love, mercy, and forgiveness.

I see two scratchy places here: First, if God's Love is here, available-- then I do not control it. And control is seldom an easy attitude to surrender.

Second, if I wish to polish my image so that God can be seen more clearly in me, the resulting action, the logical response is that I imitate God in offering love and not expecting sacrifice of others. How am I at offering mercy and forgiveness to others for their sins against me or mine?

The Gospel continues the theme: the Pharisee comes before God with his "ducks all in a row," totally ready for the blessings that he has earned; the Publican, on the other hand, comes to God deeply conscious of his sins, of his place before God and his utter dependence on God's love. And Jesus says, it is the Publican who goes away justified. The Pharisee is so full of himself; there is no room for God.

When someone makes a retreat, using the format of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, there are certain graces given throughout the process. The director is there to listen for signs that these graces have been received. One of the earliest is the awareness of oneself as a "redeemed sinner."

In the light of these Lenten days, what connection to the message of Hosea and today's familiar Gospel story can we make? What do you want to say to God in response?

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