

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jul 5th 2017

Today is our oldest grandson's birthday—July 5. He will turn six years old this year. There are no words to express the joy and love he has brought into our lives. His parents—our oldest son and his wife, have discovered the grace, joy and occasional heartache of parenthood. Most of us who are parents and/or grandparents know that although profoundly enriched by their son, their lives will never be the same.

In today's reading from Genesis, Abraham experiences tremendous pain, heartache and is "greatly distressed" when God directs him to send his son Ishmael and Ishmael's mother Hagar away. Hagar and Ishmael cannot remain with Abraham and Sarah but God promises to "make a great nation" of Ishmael. In spite of God's promise to care for Hagar and Ishmael, we can imagine the tremendous pain and sorrow that Abraham must have endured as he said farewell to them.

Abraham discovers like all parents that parenthood demands much from us. The moment a mother is aware that she is pregnant, the presence of that new life draws her attention inward and for many months she experiences dramatic changes in her body--at times perhaps intense discomfort. During childbirth her entire focus is on the laboring process which controls her body. Even with modern medicine the pain may be overwhelming. Those who are assisting her do everything they can to ease her discomfort.

Once her baby is born her attention moves from the pain to the beautiful tiny face and body that has emerged from her own body. The wonder and unfathomable mystery of this new life sweeps her into a new relationship. Although the pain remains, her awareness of it has been pushed far from her immediate attention. When a baby is born, many parents express an overwhelming sense of God's presence. Some say that it is the closest they have ever been to God.

All of us experience heartache in life whether we are parents or not. We may experience an illness, the loss of a loved one, an accident or job termination. Our distress takes over our mind and body much like childbirth and we struggle with the pain and anguish. Others around us realize they cannot take away our pain but they stand in care and empathy while we experience the darkness hoping they can provide some relief. From meals, cards, phone calls, prayers, conversations and visits we recognize the solidarity that is being offered to us and hopefully begin to see some glimpses of light. They offer God's love to us through their actions. We in turn are called to do the same when we see others suffering.

Today's culture can keep us separated from one another and we are not always in touch with the pain of others. When we reach out to another rather than waiting to be asked; when we provide gestures of love whether they are acknowledged or not; when we stay with others who are in pain rather than turn away...we become the presence of God.

God reaches out to Hagar and Ishmael caring and comforting them in order to ease their suffering. Perhaps Abraham was able to share his heartache with another. How do we reach out to be the hands and face of God to touch the suffering of the world?

May we all be midwives helping to give birth to God each and every day of our lives to infuse sparks

of light into the darkness of the world.

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