

27th Sunday 2009 B

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If you have been in a doctor's office recently you probably have seen the ubiquitous "pain scale." On this picture/poster there is a scale from 1-10 with accompanying faces that are meant to represent the pain you are feeling. "1" is a smiley face and the smile changes into a grimace and a blood curdling scream for "10." Do you know what I'm talking about?

So if you were to use the pain scale, where would you be hearing the readings we have just heard? I imagine that those of you who have experienced divorce and separation might be higher up on the pain scale than those of you who haven't had to struggle with this painful human experience where hopes, dreams, expectations of living happily ever after did not materialize.

I imagine that the gay and lesbian members of our community and their parents and siblings who meet today after liturgy may also be high on the pain scale since they do not see their experience of love and partnership or those of their children reflected in the Scriptures today. I imagine that those in our community who have always wanted a life-time partnership and who have never found their soul-mate may also be high on the pain scale since their desires for companionship and intimate union have never been met. I imagine that there are some who hear the Genesis reading of creation of the woman from the rib of Adam and groan since it can be heard as male superior to female. So where are you on the pain scale today? Maybe you were feeling no pain until I began my homily and now you're high on the pain scale.

I thought of this pain scale in reference to today's scriptures when I was sitting in a doctor's office, looking at the faces going from happy to screaming and remembering three years ago when I received a call from an anxious mother who said her daughter was so upset by these scripture readings about divorce that she would never return to a Catholic church again. Her parents were divorced and she heard these readings as a condemnation of them. She was old enough to understand why her parents' marriage could not continue and she was mature enough to understand they were not to blame. As much as they may have wanted the marriage to work, it wasn't possible. So we met to talk and I moved into damage control mode.

I told her that Jesus had been put on the spot by the lawyers who wanted him to say something he would regret. They were setting a trap for him. Jesus knew the human heart better than anyone and would understand human failings and the fact that much in life doesn't work out as you would hope. I tried to explain that in Jesus' time the woman was subservient to the will of the man and at least Jesus was giving the woman in a marriage the same rights and responsibilities as the man. I tried to explain that there are other scriptures that are not quite as black and white as this where there are exceptions to the rule of a prohibition on divorce in the early community. As I said, damage control. And thanks be to God, this young parishioner still comes to church (even though I gave her a heads up about today's readings.)

There's no doubt about it, these readings are painful to hear since they don't SEEM to address the "messiness" of life and human relationships. They can seem like a judgment on those who do not see their life experiences reflected in the Scriptures. But is this a case of missing the forest for the trees? Is there a larger context of life that we are asked to reflect on this morning? Instead of narrowing the focus on divorce and its pain can we open the lens so that we can see a greater horizon?

The horizon today is meant to be the creation of life itself. "In the beginning..." we hear in the reading from Genesis. In the beginning we hear from Jesus God made them male and female. God created. And in this version of the story of creation, God gets down and dirty. God does not create from afar but God uses the dust of the earth to create. God's hands are "messy, dusty, dirty" (perhaps a precursor to the mess that human beings will make of the earth.)

Today's scriptures are meant to remind us that our God is a creator, a fashioner, a joiner, a "unionizer." From the beginning of time God is fashioning a world where people can be partners, not just marriage partners, but partners in the whole work of creation. Correctly read, the reading from Genesis is not about male superiority over female.... God creates the HU-man from the dust of the earth but one "human" is not enough for partnership, for co-operation. The hu-man must be two. From the side of the hu-man is the wo-man. The one, now two, but equal, partners, meant to be co-creators with God.

Today happens to be the feast of St Francis of Assisi who celebrated the gift of all creation and all relationships. Brother Sun and Sister Moon. Our sister

mother earth. Aren't we invited today to see all of life as relationship as Francis says in his Canticle of the Sun or in the story of Brother Wolf whom he treats as a brother and friend rather than an enemy? Today is also Respect Life Sunday where we are called to reflect deeply on the mystery of life. All living things, our living, breathing mother earth is meant to be cared for, protected, cherished as all of life from its origins in the womb to its natural passing to eternal life is meant to be protected, cherished, respected as belonging to God.

Yes, life is at times very complicated, messy. We make choices that are not for life, love, genuine faithful relationship. God knows we do. But can we, despite our failures to love, honor and respect life, let ourselves be drawn into the great mystery of God's union with us? Can we believe and trust in a God who is not about division and separation but ultimately about reconciliation and union? That's a big challenge, maybe a big pain, but that's the great mystery we are called to live.