

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME: September 17, 2023

I am not sure whether they still are showing Sesame Street on television. It used to be a favorite of mine – I won't tell you at what age I was! Among others, I liked Kermit the Frog. "It's not easy to be green" he would say. That got me thinking after reading today's scriptures - well it's not easy being a human being either! Kermit and the rest of the natural world know who they are and what they are supposed to be doing.

Maybe I thought about this because we are in the Season of Creation which began on September 1st and extends to the feast of Saint Francis on October 4th. It is a time to remind ourselves of our connection and relationship to all living creatures and creation itself. They have an awful lot of things to teach us. But, unfortunately, we have mistreated creation and used the world as objects to be manipulated rather than subjects to relate to. We have abused the created world and used it for our own advantage. Now that world is suffering and we are experiencing the dire consequences of their plight.

Now what does all this have to do with today's scriptures? I am glad you asked. Seeking and giving forgiveness is one important thing we humans can do to reestablish the natural order of who we really are. When we forgive we choose right relationship with God, with all human beings, with creation, and with our very selves. We free ourselves to be in union with all that is.

But it is not easy being human. We all seem to be very unsure of who we are; we feel inadequate, insecure. So we have to hide our true, insecure selves and put on defensive fronts. As a matter of fact, we have to do that. As children, we have to learn to develop a good, strong, ego. The world is too big and too threatening for us not to have a good strong ego. As we get older we also learn to choose how to use power to subdue others to enhance ourselves. Or we can gather possessions to feel better about ourselves. In truth our economic system with its consumerist drives tells us that we are what we own.

The animal world tells us that we live in a rich world of abundance. However, we live as it were a limited world of scarcity. We never have enough. God has given us a drive for more, for something that will fulfill our deep desires and needs. We mistake that for owning more things. Then we have to defend our empire of possessions. Keep others out. Lie, cheat, take advantage of others. Do whatever builds up our own world. The more we have the more we have to defend.

So it no surprise that we do things to hurt others and take advantage of others, live a style of life that imposes on others. But, as we get older, we usually become aware that we are not really happy. Among other things we have to do in order to find real freedom is to let go of hurts. We must forgive. And we need to be forgiven by those we hurt.

A turning point for some is to wake up to the goodness and abundance of creation. We can recover the sense of wonder that we so often see in a little child. And we can be grateful for all that has been given to us, the little we really need, and the blessings of simplicity in living. We can become free. We can be happy who we are and be grateful.

“Life is not about you” is an adage that takes on more meaning; rather, “I am about life.” My individual well-being has to be part of the bigger life scenario. All is one. All is connected. All is relational. If we leave God out of the picture we lack that unity. We are not one with reality. The same occurs with being one with all humanity, with creation, and with our inner selves. All is pure gift.

There is a lot of good advice both from the story Jesus tells and from the sayings of Sirach. “Remember the end of your life, and set enmity aside; remember corruption and death and be true to the commandments. ... Do not be angry with your neighbor.... Remember the covenant of the Lord, and overlook faults.”

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