



MIRACULOUS COMMUNICATION

The following two reflections on today's Gospel about Jesus curing the leper were written by Jay Cormier. The first one is titled Miraculous Communication. Cormier writes:

"My husband and I can't say two words to each other without drawing blood," a woman cried to her therapist. "The second he walks through the door, we're at each other's throats. Deep down, I know the love's still there, but it seems hopelessly buried."

The therapist listens to her intently; then he reached into his drawer, pulled out a bottle, and handed it to her. "This is special water, holy water from a sacred spring in India," the therapist explained. "For the next week, whenever your husband's about to enter the room, take a drink, hold your tongue and look into his eyes. After a couple of seconds, swallow it. You should notice an improvement in your interactions right away."

The woman went home and waited eagerly for her husband to return. When he walked in, she took a swig of the blessed water and silently held his gaze. He gave her a suspicious look, then grinned curiously. She swallowed the water and asked how his day went. Amazingly, they didn't argue. In fact, they had one of the warmest and loving conversations they had had in recent memory. The next night before he came to bed, she took another jolt of the powerful liquid, performing the same ritual. Suddenly, as if a veil was lifted, she saw him in a whole new light; she saw him as if it were the first time again; she saw the man she fell in love with, and of course, the predictable fight never came.

The following week, the woman returned to her therapist, proclaiming that the treatment had healed her marriage and that she needed to get more of this miraculous water - and fast.

The therapist smiled and revealed that the potent elixir was nothing but store-bought Mountain Spring water.

It is not the "magical" water that reconnects these two spouses - it is the woman's desire to heal her relationship with her husband that brings about their reconciliation. The miracle that healed the woman's turbulent marriage was not the water but her willingness to drink it: to stop and look at her husband with new eyes, to put aside her urge to lash out from her hurts and disappointments, and speak, first, from the love they cherish in one another. The request that the leper makes of Jesus - if you wish, you can make me clean - is a challenge to all of us who now seek to follow Jesus. We possess within ourselves the resources to heal and

restore our relationships with others - what is needed first is the will to put aside our own fears and doubts and interests to do so. Christ promises us the grace to be imitators of his compassion and forgiveness whenever we are ready to take the first step in healing the wounds and cleaning the "leprosy" that afflicts us and divides us from one another.

(Next Sunday after all the Masses, we will have available buckets of the miraculous water at a 75% discount.)

The Beauty in Brokenness

A young woman faces her divorce:

"Every time I tell another person that I'm divorced, it feels like admitting to failure right up front. In fact, I'm ashamed to be divorced because it means I've failed. . . The fact that it's a rather public failure, the kind people can discover five minutes after meeting me, just compounds the issue. . . I had never encountered a situation before where I couldn't make things better by trying harder, by sheer force of will and prodigious effort, and it broke me.

"I'll say it again: It broke me. I remember rocking back and forth on my couch, in so much pain that I couldn't even cry and could hardly breathe."

But then, one morning in church ("of all places"), she came to understand that God had not abandoned her:

"I remember the pastor telling us that in the same way that sharks die if they don't keep moving through the water, so we die spiritually if we don't keep moving forward. I realized in that moment that I had been trying to hold myself still - out of fear, out of a misguided sense of loyalty to my spouse, out of anger and pain - and it was killing me spiritually."

Walking out of church, she realized that, even though her life was in shambles, the story of her life was far from over:

"When my two-year old son, wrapped his arms around my neck on the way to the parking lot, they were the arms of God. Nothing in my life, before or since, has been as great a gift as that moment. . . . When we open ourselves to grace, we can experience moments of sheer joy in the face of hell. And when our lives level out again and we're no longer living moment to moment, we can bring that joy back to share with others. The catch - and it's a big one - is that we can communicate that joy only if we're willing to communicate our brokenness."

She also discovered something else:

"I have a friend from church who recently went through a painful separation from her spouse. When she talked about the confusion, loneliness, and desperate hope she suffered, I could listen; when I said, 'I know, sweetie,' she

could trust that I really did. And when I told her it would hurt like crazy for a really long time but that it would get better, she could believe me. The people who have helped me the most, too, are the people who are willing to admit their exhaustion and their anger as well to their triumphs and strengths.

"I'm not living the life I thought I would - I'm certainly not living the life I had planned - but that doesn't stop me from responding to God's call at least as well as I could have in the life I had idealized. God doesn't call us to live perfect, bright, shiny lives. All God asks of us is to live in grace with honesty and integrity."

We often reduce others to "lepers" - those "broken" people who don't measure up to our standards of righteousness and goodness, who don't "fit" our image of propriety and success. And sometimes we become swallowed up in our own sense of "uncleanliness" and unworthiness and remove ourselves from family and community. The Christ who heals lepers comes to heal us, as well - to heal us of our debilitating sense of self that blinds us to the sacredness and dignity of those we demean as "lepers"; to heal us of our own "leprosy" so that we can realize again that God extends his compassion and grace even to the likes of us. Before God, no one is a leper, no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy and compassion; all of us are sons and daughters of God, all of us are made in the sacred image of the God of justice, peace and reconciliation.

Faith Sharing Question

What spoke to you most in the above two stories?

A Meditation for Valentine's Day

Sr. Melanie Svoboda, SND, wrote the following meditation for Valentine's Day.

Whenever I think of Valentine's Day, I think of God. Even though, liturgically speaking, the feast is not significant, I know that it belongs to God in a special way. For Valentine's Day is for lovers, and God is the greatest lover of them all.

And being so, he has all the symptoms of someone in love: he is blind, he does foolish things, and he is susceptible to hurt.

Like all lovers, God is blind. How else can we explain the fact that mankind (and womankind) has endured for all these thousands of years despite pettiness, lying, cheating, fighting, killing, and all the other evils too numerous and too depressing to mention? Certainly God must be blind - or at least he must be seeing things with different eyes. Yes, that's probably more accurate... God the lover sees things and people and events with eyes different from our own.

For example, where we see only a little singing shepherd boy, God sees a mighty king of Israel and a man after his own heart. Where we see a blustering big fisherman, God sees a strong leader capable of dying out of love. Where we see only death, God sees birth into a new life. And on and on the examples could go. God may be blind, all right. But

we are shortsighted - which is often worse than being blind.

Lovers do foolish things. And it was God who began all foolishness in the first place when he created us and then did a really foolish thing - he gave us free will. This free will business has always bothered me because I saw it as opening the door to almost unimaginable kinds of evil. In my short-sightedness, I had forgotten that it is free will alone that makes all love possible.

Lovers get hurt, badly, sometimes irreparably. They confess their love to their beloved and are met with scorn or laughter or (worst of all) indifference. God is a lot like that. He sent his Son among us as a declaration of his great love, and we nailed him to a cross.

But lovers have another quality: they are persistent. And certainly God is that. He keeps professing his love for us through all the large and small gifts he sends into our lives - like sunsets and daisies and puppies and friends and goodness. But sometimes (in our shortsightedness) we tend to pay more attention to these mere signs of his love and we forget all about him.

I heard a priest put it this way once, in a charming parable. He said: "God is like a lover who gives us a big box of chocolates; and we love chocolate very, very much. We say a quick "Thanks" and we begin to devour the candy, thinking how good it tastes and how happy it makes us. What we don't realize is that God has put his telephone number at the bottom of the box, underneath all the candy, because his real gift is NOT the candy - it is the fact that he wants to establish a relationship with us. But we are so caught up with the candy that, when we finally finish eating it, we throw away the box (with the telephone number) and sit and hope for more candy."

Valentine's Day, then, should be a reminder for us of our greatest lover, God. And that the greatest valentine he wants to give to us is not a paper heart or a box of chocolates. It is himself.

PRAYER

God of all people, remind us that your love knows no boundaries.

You love the outcasts and the oppressed with a love that is fierce in its protection and grace.

When our lives get too comfortable, nudge us into going beyond our own boundaries, bringing outsiders into the warmth of our communities.

Have a blessed week,

Le Paran