

10th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

Infidelity, the act of being unfaithful is as old as humanity. Stories abound on stage and screen, books and magazines about infidelity. Even the Bible contains stories of infidelity. The Word of God today presents us with a married individual who was the victim of his wife's infidelity, namely Hosea.

Hosea was a prophet deeply influenced by his marital experience. Hosea's wife, Gomer – that's right Gomer – and you thought the only Gomer was Gomer Pyle, USMC. Well, long before the USMC, Sergeant Carter and Gomer Pyle, there was another Gomer. In any event, Gomer was a cultic prostitute who was unfaithful to Hosea.

Interestingly enough, Hosea's love for her was so deep he could not abandon her. This love of Hosea for his unfaithful spouse is a microcosm of God's love for the faithless Israel. In the fourteen chapters of this book, the prophet Hosea, as God's spokesperson, chastises Israel for their infidelity but invites them to return to him.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Hosea is his heart. He was one of those heart persons, who cut through the fluff and phoniness. What is more, in surveying his book it is evident that he had a fascination with the heart.

A number of times Hosea refers to the heart in his conversation with Israel. In chapter 2:11 he says, "I will lead you into the desert and speak to her heart." In chapter 7:8 he says, "They have not cried to me from their hearts when they wailed upon their beds." In chapter 11:8 Hosea speaks of his own broken heart when he says, "My heart is overwhelmed, my pity is stirred." Finally in chapter 13:8 his emotions intensify and he says, "I will attack them like a bear robbed of its young and tear their hearts from their breasts." Indeed, Hosea exudes strong passion and speaks from the heart.

The passion of Hosea manifests itself in today's first reading. In this account, Hosea finds fault with Israel's religious practices which lack heart. Hosea says, "Your piety is like a morning cloud, like the dew that early passes away." Do you remember this past week the morning fog? That is the morning cloud. It came, but it went. Or how about early in the morning, the grass is soaking wet from the dew, but in a very short time the dew dries up. Both of these images capture for Hosea the faith of Israel, which is fleeting and lacks substance. Israel knows all the ritual practices of the faith, but they are purely mechanical and lack the interiority and ownership of the heart. As a result Hosea feels compelled to say, "For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice."

My brothers and sisters, as we come to worship, the Lord does not want so much our sacrifice but our love. What good is it to deny ourselves this or that if we can't even love our brother or sister? Or what good is it to embrace all the pietistic practices of the faith and not have heart?

The Lord wants our hearts, even if they are broken or riddled with sin. The Gospel today illustrates this point when Jesus says to Matthew, the sinful tax collector, "Follow me."

As we take a look into our lives we may think that we are not good enough to follow Jesus, given our failures, faults, and idiosyncrasies. But Jesus does not look at us for what we are, but for what we can become. As the saying goes, "Sinners have a past, saints have a future." Jesus wants us to be part of that future. We, for our part, must give a whole-hearted commitment. Anything short of that is infidelity.

Did you ever wonder in hearing about stories of infidelity, how could the victim ever forgive and accept the adulterer into their heart? Look at Hosea, how could he ever consider keeping his wife with whom he fathered three children? Closer to home, how does Jesus keep loving and forgiving us in our infidelity? Perhaps it is because he has a huge, loving heart. And you know what? It is that heart and love that remains the greatest story ever told.