

June 23, 2020

I realize that Oedipus Rex is a bit of a tough sell on a Monday in June what with the murder and the incest and suicide of his mother and then ripping his own eyes out but this is June of 2020, you have to remember that and our experience of being human has been challenged and traumatized and we are not used to not being in charge of our own lives as we like to think we are.

Loneliness is a radical human experience that we work hard to keep under control in ordinary times. In ordinary times we can distract ourselves and busy ourselves so that we can trick our minds, our consciousness, if you will, into being full up with no room for feeling lonely.

But we do, feel lonely anyway despite our best efforts to not feel loneliness and now in the confused world of social distancing it is complicated and, maybe, we might let our loneliness teach us some things we might never learn otherwise.

I have heard from more than one grandparent that they would rather be sick, even die than not get to hug or kiss their grandkids. I am not a grandparent or parent, but I am feeling deprived of human contact as a giver and as a receiver.

We want to be important to other people, we need to be important, it is an essential aspect of being human that we find ourselves to be special and we want that specialness recognized by another and the grandparent/grandchild relationship carries and plays a special role in this humanizing process.

Throughout our lives, we all have this essential human need to be important to another and if that doesn't happen in appropriate ways or we are chronically deprived of human encounters of respectful touch, we compensate in inappropriate ways and we pursue self-destructive paths that shame us, at least in our own eyes as punishment for wanting to be important and wanting to be encountered by another human being.

It is in this shaming business that an awful lot of sickness in Catholicism has festered and poisoned lots of innocent people with these terrible notions of unworthiness and the sinfulness of human nature.

If you take a serious look at the two stories of creation in the first two chapters of Book of Genesis, just as they are and not try and make them some kind of historical account of creation, you can see how we are “made” to want to be special and we are “made” to want to be sure that we have people that we “make” special.

They are not about reproductive plumbing, they are about intimacy, human and divine intimacy with one another.

I had not seen this before as clearly as I do now. Previously I took them to be two different stories but in the light of this current time of distance from one another, I can see that they are all one story that make for one narrative.

Simply put the first Genesis story tells us that what we call human beings, God calls love, admittedly that word is not used in those accounts, but the grandparents who would rather be sick or die than not make their grandchild special and allow their grandchildren to make them special are talking about love just like Genesis is talking about love.

The second Genesis story tells us how God made the human being. God’s fingerprints are all over the human beings from shaping the clay to opening the side and “building” up that rib and, most intimately, breathing God’s own life into the human being.

I have seen parents and grandparents breathe all over their kids and grandkids, kissing them and caressing them and touching them with loving fingers and lips.

Over the years it has been my privilege to be a confidant to young people growing up who tell me that they have found someone that they cannot keep their hands off of and that all they want to do is share their breathing with one another.

I have witnessed many, many times the anguished last touches of spouses and lovers who let their breathless lovers go as they struggle to follow love into mystery through tears.

All very Godlike behaviors, it seems to me.

I know that many people, many, many people, cannot believe that you can follow love into mystery and that the death of a beloved is the end of it all, but, could it be that they want to avoid grief with an intellectual conviction because they are afraid that they can no longer be special to another human and believe that they and their loves are just a part of reproductive plumbing.

On the other hand, the chipper confidence of super believers in a heaven running on a dual track with earth is probably too good to be true so it isn't without the painful and desolate process of loss and loneliness that are necessary to follow our loves into mystery.

I believe that our loneliness can teach us that the intimacy with God that is our origin is our destiny if we allow ourselves to grieve and, in this summer of 2020, there is much to grieve in this world.