

In Greek mythology there is the story of Narcissus. He was a man renowned for his extreme good looks. Everybody who saw him desired him but he tended to not give them the time of day. One day he gazes into a pool of water, sees his own reflection and falls into the trap of becoming entranced by his own looks, and will spend his time looking at himself.

Narcissism is a personality disorder with the tendency to be focussed on our own selves. It has been with humanity from the beginning. However those who work with people now, especially millennials and Gen Z's note a growth in narcissistic behavior. They focus on themselves and their own ways and want everything to be based on their way. The formators in seminaries have noted this among the men coming in; these men insist on having things their way, they expect the church, seminary, the world to bow to their ideas, their values... There have been some unfortunate events, and great sadness as a consequence.

Beyond seminary, we have social media influencers, celebrities, others whose whole goal is to promote themselves. Narcissism is a symptom of a society that has focussed so much on individual rights and the need for self promotion.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and God created all in harmony because God is harmony, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the second story of creation God created the lone human, the man, Adam. Yet, the harmony was lacking with Adam because he was alone. God then created woman, an equal to the man; equal in strength, bone of my bone; and equal in weakness, flesh of my flesh. They were partners and their harmony, their wholeness, came from their partnership; not only with each other, but with God; and through this, they experienced harmony with the rest of the world. Rather they did until they left God out of it.

When couples come to me to start the sacrament of marriage preparation I will ask them about the "Goal" of marriage. Usually I get the answer about kids, happiness, somebody to get old with... And these are nice, but they are incorrect answers.

The Goal of marriage, like the goal of life, is to become holy. We are meant to be the best versions of ourselves as God created us. We Catholics call this the Universal Call to Holiness.

Marriage is the sacrament that signifies the reality that God has bonded God's self to all of humanity. Marriage signifies the reality that we need each other to become the best versions of ourselves. Marriage signifies that the reality of human existence means we must always have community, married or unmarried, we must always be in relationship with others to thrive and be fulfilled.

Whether this occurs through that exclusive relationship of husband and wife; or through the inclusive relationship a religious will have with parish or community; or whether it comes from friendships, service to others, within a community of a parish... whatever form it takes, it has its beginnings in God and this harmony.

Relationships matter.

And they require effort and work; to overcome this tendency to be about me, myself and I.

A couple of weeks ago at the Confirmation kick off while the teens were making sandwiches for a service project, the parents watched a video on the teenage mind. It was great. We know that brains and minds change in adolescence. During that process teens can think that they are the only ones to have experienced what they are going through, or the only one to live that level of anguish. It was funny and enlightening. I was also thinking I have known adults like that...heck I have acted that way as an adult.

What does Jesus critique in our Gospel? I think there are two related levels here. First, Jesus clearly is calling out that Moses and the people will willingly give up on a relationship quite easily. Jesus expresses his consternation that they will disregard something that reveals a strength of humanity, something of God; because their hearts become hardened.

In Jesus' time, divorce was the power of the husband. He simply had to write a letter stating he divorced the woman; for whatever cause...she

could not clean, cook, have children, or some “sin”. This also placed the woman in a precarious situation in society.

He criticizes the willingness to give up, or to take for granted the relationship. The harmony God desires and intends is diminished.

And I also think that Jesus critiques this allowance because it would say that God too can easily divorce humanity, that God can easily give up on us.

And nothing could ever be further from the truth, from reality.

Jesus never gave up on humanity. God never gives up on humanity. God loves us. Even as Jesus is nailed to a cross, there is forgiveness in his words at his own rejection by humanity.

And God’s response to this rejection? God does not divorce humanity. God breathes life into the man, the Son, Jesus and gives him back to us. Jesus’ resurrection signifies God’s faithfulness to us. The resurrected Jesus is The Sign of God’s love; the Sign of God’s forgiveness; the Sign of God persistence of love for us.

We may think that God has forsaken us, left us. We may experience a darkness in our lives, a sense of abandonment; but God has embraced God’s children, us. God never forsakes us, God never divorces us.

All of this is given to us in the Sacrament of Eucharist; the reality of love, forgiveness, persistence, faithfulness, harmony; placed into our willing hands in the bread and cup. The bread and wine breathed upon by the Holy Spirit that become the person of the Son of God.

Given to us, as husbands and wives to grow in commitment as one.  
Given to us as families, to strengthen our bonds as parents, children.  
Given to us as parish; to work together as one for the good of all.  
Given to us as women and men; to see ourselves as part of something larger than our own selves.

Given to us to experience God, the creator of life.