

Breaking Codependency

6th Sunday of Easter (Year C)

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We often speak of Jesus as the one who is always there for us and never leaves us. He helps us with our problems, takes away our sins, and lives through us. He cares so much about us that he will do anything and everything to save us. While all this sounds very holy, in the real world this is called codependency.

Codependency is when one focuses so much on another person that they forget to take care of themselves. As Melody Beattie in her book *Codependent No More* defines it, “a codependent person is one who has let another person’s behavior affect him or her, and who is obsessed with controlling that person’s behavior.” (34) What may have started out as genuinely caring for the needs of another person, in other words, quickly turned into a form of control. In trying to be the ‘the helper’ who is ‘always there,’ codependents treat everyone else as if they can’t help themselves.

Codependency can reach the point where the codependent person is sicker than the other person with the actual problem. For example, we think of a parent who cannot let their child grow up. They try to live through them by heavily influencing every decision they make. Or, we think of the spouse of someone with an alcohol problem. In trying to help, they keep enabling the addiction to occur. The great sickness of the codependent person is that they secretly want to perpetuate their loved ones’ problem so that they will continue to be needed and indispensable to their lives. Codependents know no boundaries and cannot separate their needs from everyone else’s needs. They are addicted to being needed.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "I am going away...if you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father." Between this Gospel and next weekend's feast of the Ascension of the Lord, Jesus is intentionally separating from us. Yes, he loves us, but no, he does not want to keep us needy. He doesn't want us to be codependent on him. His leaving, as hard as it may be, is for our benefit. He says, 'unless I go, the Holy Spirit cannot come.' In other words, there can be no Pentecost without the Ascension. There can be no empowerment of others in the freedom of the Spirit without first backing off to give them space.

By leaving us, Jesus breaks the bonds of codependency with his followers.

Going back to Melody Beattie: A moment of reckoning in her life occurred when she was in front of a judge. As a child who was abused, had eight step-fathers, traumatized, depressed, and an alcoholic by age twelve, this judge said to her: "do you know that you are responsible for your own behavior?" While Melody verbally said 'yes,' deep down she realized that that was a lie. No, she didn't know that because no adult in her life ever taught her that lesson.

The lesson of having to take responsibility for our behavior is hard to learn. We'd much rather have a codependent, someone else do life for us. Yet, even Jesus refuses to do life for his followers. We have to do it for ourselves. This can be shocking to religious ears. That is why Jesus says today: "and now I have told you this before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe."