

Hosea was blessed to be a prophet over the span of decades. However, the strains and difficulties of his married life were not so pleasant. They became subject matter for his warnings to the nation of Israel. Hosea's strained relationship with his wife is symbolic of the lopsided covenant between the Lord and Israel. "Accuse your mother, accuse! For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove her prostitution from her face, her adultery from between her breasts" (Hos 2:4). These are the tortured words of the Lord speaking to an unfaithful nation.

The Prophet "Hosea began the Old Testament tradition of describing the relation between the Lord and Israel in terms of marriage. The New Testament uses the marriage imagery to describe the union between Christ and the Church." When we speak of marriage, we speak of Christ pouring himself out for us on the cross. In the New Covenant, Christ sheds his blood for our salvation. "Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate" (Mk 10:9).

Like God, Hosea wants his wife to return to him. Hosea speaks tenderly of the first love. There was a brief period in the desert when Israel was loyal. Hosea's wife is unfaithful, she causes him much pain, but he is still in love and wants to reconcile with her. "Just as the Lord is ready to take Israel back, Hosea takes his wife back. She must undergo a period of purification, just as Israel must experience purification before the restoration of the covenant relationship" (Hos Intro). Each year, Lent is our annual 40-day period of purification as the Lord calls us back into right relationship. This past year has seemed like a 12-month long Lent. And still there is much to be purified.

In our Gospel, Jesus commands us to love God "with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk 12:30). We know that Jesus is willing to suffer for his bride. He undergoes the passion and dies that we might be purified. How does humanity respond to this love? Are we not short sighted as in generations past?

"God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say, 'We have fellowship with him,' while we continue to walk in darkness, we lie and do not act in truth...If we say, 'We are without sin,' we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...If we say, 'We have not sinned,' we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 Jn 1 6,8,10).

Hosea spells out his wife's infidelity in the same way that he points to the sins of Israel. They have broken the covenant: "(1) by counting on their own military strength, (2) by making treaties with foreign powers... and (3) by running after the [false] gods of fertility" (Intro). Unfaithfulness will lead to Israel's destruction.

If Hosea were to speak about our generation, what ways might we be accused of breaking the covenant: (1) Jesus gave his life for us in an unbreakable covenant. We have a generation that is afraid to make commitments. (2) Jesus came to fulfill the prophecies. We live in a cancel culture that condemns the past and wishes to erase it. The baby is thrown out with the bath water. (3) Jesus shows us that love involves sacrifice. This generation idolizes sexuality. Instant gratification is a perversion of the self-sacrificial love that Jesus models.

The Lord does not want death for the sinner. "Repent, says the Lord; the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4:17). The Lord wants the repentant sinner to return to him. "I will heal their defection, says the LORD, I will love them freely; for my wrath is turned away from them. I will be like the dew for Israel ... Let him who is wise understand these things; let him who is prudent know them. Straight are the paths of the LORD, in them the just walk" (Hos 14:5,10).