

Twenty-Seventh Sunday Ordinary B21      October 3, 2021

One of the most popular category of books (maybe THE most popular) is “**Biography**”.

The evidence for this is the **amount of shelf space** devoted to them --- whether that be in a bookstore or in a public library ---

shelf after shelf after shelf filled with **stories about the lives of real people**.

Many of these books are about people who knew exactly what they wanted --- and **did everything in their power to get it**.

And in some cases (maybe many) the path to realizing their dreams was not a path filled only

with **kindness and honesty and sincerity and generosity**.

No --- in many cases the path to success was filled with the opposite.

And what that often meant was that many people along the way **got used**,

people along the way **got hurt**, people along the way **got defrauded**, people along the way **got stepped on**.

Maybe a few of these ambitious people meant to act that way all along, meant to use others for their own gain without batting an eye.

But my guess is that, for most of these “success stories”, it **didn’t start out that way.**

It just became the **easiest way** to achieve what they wanted to achieve,

became a kind of bad habit that became sort of invisible to the person involved.

In other words --- after a while it just became “who they were” - -- with the **prize** they were seeking being **all they paid attention to.**

The people they hurt along the way, well --- they were just a **means to an end.**

In today’s readings we hear some profound words regarding marriage ---

that sacred bond that unites men and women not simply in a **practical** sense,

but in a **holy** sense, in a **mystical sense.**

The words in these passages can be both inspiring and challenging, comforting and worrisome,

a **real possibility** and a seemingly **impossible pursuit**.

Those of you who are married know what I am talking about --- because you strive to live it out each and every day.

You understand the joys **AND** the sorrows, the bliss **AND** the drudgery,

the “**everything is wonderful**” moments and the times when you almost **feel like strangers**.

And some of you have also experienced the pain and disappointment that comes whenever a **marriage has fallen apart**,

whenever two people find themselves facing not only the **thought** that “enough is enough”,

but find themselves **embracing the real-life consequences of getting to that point**.

Relationships are hard, and marriage might be the **most difficult of all**.

And the reason is pretty simple.

No other relationship demands as much from us, no other relationship costs as much,

no other relationship invites us (or maybe even forces us) to **resist the urge to give in to our own selfishness ---**

that unhealthy voice within that keeps lying to us and telling us that we should **look out for ourselves above all else.**

A healthy marriage is the exact opposite of that.

A healthy marriage is one in which **neither** partner **uses each other for his or her own benefit,**

neither partner has picked the other exclusively for what he or she can “bring to the table”,

what he or she can do to make them happy.

Rather, the best marriages seem to be the ones in which each partner spends his or

her time wondering how they can make their spouse’s life better,

**how they can help their spouse on the journey before them,**

how they can **love** their spouse even during the times when that love is not being **returned**.

In other words, the healthiest marriages are not ones in which people continually think,

“What can I **GET** out of this person?” but rather continually ask the questions, “What can I **GIVE** to this person?”

“Who can I **BE** for this person” --- in this moment, in this situation, on this day, and for always?”

Of course, there isn't just a temptation to act selfishly in **romantic relationships**.

The temptation exists in all of our relationships, in varying degrees.

We befriend people who are popular, hoping that might **open some doors for us**.

We size people up --- wondering if they might be a **potential customer** for the product we are selling.

We pick partners who will **let us call the shots**.

We pretend to agree with every opinion of our boss so **he or she likes us better**.

These are just seemingly trivial examples, but many of us litter our lives with relationships just like these ---

and then we wonder why we don't have any "**real**" friends, don't have any people we can count on to be there for us in five, ten, or twenty years down the road.

It's not easy building relationships that are truly **other-centered**, that are **God-centered**,

that are all about the opportunities we have to be kind and generous and compassionate **with someone else**.

Yet, that is what we are called to be, **who we are meant to be**.

And the amazing thing is --- when we make others' lives better, **our lives become better too**.

Put simply --- **OTHERS** need our love and **WE** need people to love. Imagine that.