

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 13, 2010

Some of you may have read or heard about the book *The Shack*. The book has a lot of pretty radical ideas in it that are kind of far-fetched, but there are also some good things in the book that make sense. The book is about a father of a family who has experienced a serious personal tragedy. As a result of the tragedy, the father is bitter toward God, partially blaming God for the tragedy, something that many people automatically do when tragedy strikes. They blame God.

One day the father finds an invitation in his mailbox from God to spend a weekend with the three persons of the Blessed Trinity in a shack in the woods. During that weekend the father has many conversations about many religious topics. Since the father just went through a recent tragedy, he wants to know why God deals out punishment for sin. The father asks, If you are God, aren't you the one spilling out great bowls of wrath and throwing people into a burning lake of fire? Isn't that what the Bible tells us, he asks? God the Father, who is referred to as Papa in the book, responds by saying: I don't need to punish people for sin. Sin is its own punishment, devouring you from the inside. It's not my purpose to punish; it is my joy to cure it.

A lot of people in our society feel the way that the father of the family does in the book. After all, the catechism does define sin as an offense against God. So then, it stands to reason that God might want to retaliate in some way. In addition to this, The Bible does relate many occasions when God did punish people for their sins. The Jewish people also felt that way, that after all, God is the Creator of everything and so then, in a sense, the cause of all that happens. The Hebrews needed simple explanations that they could understand and so the prophets figured that a good way to get the people to reform their ways and avoid offending God was to say: God will punish you if you don't behave.

In the book, Papa, God the Father, says: I don't need to punish people for sin. Sin is its own punishment. That statement helps us to understand the nature of sin and the nature of God's relationship with us. All that God ask of us is for our own good, not God's.

We do offend God when we abuse what God has created. Abusing God's creation leads to human suffering in one way or another.

A little while back, we had sessions on Reconciliation in small groups and we talked about how sin isn't a private thing. When we sin, it affects the whole community around us. Our sins have a ripple effect and down the road it causes people to suffer, because of the actions we have taken. The suffering that takes place from our sins is what causes innocent people to suffer from our sinful actions. It is not God who says, because you have sinned I am going to cause you to suffer and then in revenge pay all those who are associated with us. God isn't interested in revenge; he simply wants to give us mercy and forgiveness, a mercy and love that we sometimes don't understand.

Quite often, people in our society who do not understand God's mercy and forgiveness and want to see people punished say judgmental things such as: AIDS was a punishment from God on those who practiced promiscuous sex. If infants were born with HIV, would we still say that God is responsible for such a tragedy? Is God responsible for all the addictions going on in our society? That is not the type of God I believe in.

In our readings today we see people who wanted Jesus to cast aside the woman who was a sinner and was washing the feet of Jesus and drying them with her hair in repentance for what she had done. The woman was basically asking for forgiveness and Jesus said your sins are forgiven. The Pharisees wanted to see some groveling and they not get it from Jesus. Jesus simply continued to show and to give mercy to his people, as he continues to do to us today.

In the book, The Shack, Papa, God the Father tells the father this: Your real flaw is that you don't think I'm good. If you knew I was good and that everything, the means, the ends, and all the events of human lives, is all covered by my goodness, then while you might not always understand what I am

doing, you would trust me. But you don't. The Eucharist is a sign of Our Lord's trusting us and asking for trust in return. Let us celebrate the love and mercy and forgiveness of our God and rejoice in it.