

Homily (17th Sunday of Ordinary Time) – 7/30/2017

Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus was a popular book on relationships. One point of the book was men and women have two fundamental psychological differences. They have two different thinking styles.

So, suppose for the sake of this homily we borrow from that book. We will break up the church not into men and women, but into people with two fundamental psychological differences. The people on this side of the church are those who are thoughtful, logical, reasonable, organized thinkers. Their style puts emotions aside. They take feelings out of every situation. They are deliberate, even detached and sometimes perceived as tight. They often have alligator arms when the waiter at the restaurant comes to the table with the check. These people over here are cold. They would not know a feeling if they tripped over it. The elevator is stuck in the attic of their head. This group needs to take the elevator down to their gut. They need to be brought closer to their feelings. Now, the group over here, the elevator is stuck in their gut. The people over here are all emotion. In this group are all the drama kings and queens. If they have a hangnail they call 911. This group sees themselves as special and their lives are extremely exciting, if only in their feelings. They flood life with a tidal wave of feelings. If you allow them they write, produce, direct and star in all kinds of office drama. In relationships, they have all kinds of imaginary shipwrecks. This group needs to be brought closer to their thoughts.

The truth is we sometimes need to be brought closer to our feelings and sometimes we need to be brought closer to our thoughts. And when we do we can become more aware of our experiences. Why is this important?

If we are not more aware of our experiences, religion will become dry duty and lifeless laws. It will not be the love affair God intended. We might fail to understand what Jesus is saying in a gospel such as today's, about a person who finds a treasure hidden in a field. You see the treasure Jesus is speaking about, the one that is dug up in the field is hidden in the field of our everyday human experiences.

Now depending on which group you belong to, the group that needs to be brought closer to our thoughts or brought closer to our feelings you might see yourself in the following example.

You are plowing along in the field of your everyday experiences doing your tasks, answering phones, running an errand and then you have an encounter or event jolts us out of complacency. Something challenges you. Forces you to look at the experience again. And by looking at the experience again and staying with it, you might be amazed to discover there is gold beneath your feet. Maybe this experience taints the picture of yourself or others. Maybe the experience challenges the view we've lived by or again calls into question assumptions that have guided our lives. Often happens with the experience of loss or tragedy. Yesterday I was at the home of a Spanish family. They had lost a 19 year old member of their family in a car crash.

This young woman who had just come from Mexico in May was working at the Revlon plant in Oxford. She left home for her three o'clock afternoon shift but must have forgotten something. She drove back, lost control of the car and went into the bushes, and was thrown from the car. She died just 300 yards from her house. So along with another priest we visited her home. There in the middle of the small living room was the large white coffin and the young girl dressed in a soft blue dress. Around the coffin and taking up every inch of space were the family and dozens of the girls teenage friends. These teenagers were all dressed in white t shirts with the girls picture.

The crying and wailing was heart wrenching. Later we went out to the backyard and a under a huge white tent with about 120 people we celebrated the mass. I am sure those teenage friends of the girl will never forget that experience. They learned there is a time for tears and a time when the heavens seem dark. But there are rich experiences without such intense feelings. Maybe when we climbed the ladder of success and reached the top of the ladder only to find our ladder is against the wrong wall. Or maybe we come to see we have been telling and living the wrong story about ourselves. And now, with the right story in our head and heart a new possibility starts to emerge. Or maybe we discover the key to unlock our problems would not fit because we were trying the wrong door. Or maybe when God seems to go off script, the words of an author describe a new view of our lives.

This is why I suggested this book titled Praying Our Experiences. The author points out how to attend to your experiences. Just as the scriptures are the privileged word of God. Our own experiences are a privileged expression of that same word of God.

Isn't this what Jesus is saying in the parable? Everyone in the human family, including you, can be seen as the treasure in the field that God has sold everything to own. We are the treasure that God has moved heaven and earth to possess. That is what today's gospel is all about.