

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time.
All Saints Parish, Syracuse, NY

Oct. 6 & 7, 2012
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My dear Brothers and Sisters. You know, it sort of became a game with the Pharisees: To catch Jesus in his speech. The idea was to put him publicly into a dilemma with no good outcome. A dilemma is an unhappy situation demanding choices, none of them good for reasons of circumstances, So then whatever Jesus will answer to their trick question will be bad, damaging his reputation before the people.

On one occasion they asked this: Is it lawful to pay taxes to Cesar? They thought, if he says yes, he will be in big trouble with the people; if he says no, he could be then accused to the occupying Roman political authorities. Jesus taking one of the coins used for paying taxes asked them: Whose inscription and whose image are on this coin? They said, Caesar's. Jesus continued: Then give to Cesar what belongs to Cesar, and give to God what belongs to God. Their trap did not work.

On another occasion they brought a women before Jesus who was caught in the act of adultery. According to Mosaic Law she was to be stoned for her sin. They asked Jesus, what they should then do to her. They thought, if he says: Stone her to death according to the Law, he will be in trouble with the people, and his image as a gentle healer will be for ever damaged. On the other hand, if he says: Let her go, he can be accused of teaching the people something that is against the most respected and holy Law of Moses. Jesus said: The one without sin should throw the first stone. And then Jesus bent down and wrote something in the sand with his finger. At that they all went away since recognizing their sins and the fact that none of them had the right to condemn her without first condemning themselves. After when they were all gone, Jesus healed the woman by forgiving her sins. What may be strange to us here is that the man who was also involved in adultery with this woman was not on trial at all, was not even mentioned.

My Sisters and Brothers, in today's Gospel we heard that the Pharisees were testing Jesus again. This time the question was: Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife? According to the Mosaic Law, they said, he had the power to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her. Jesus answered that Moses allowed this because of the hardness of your hearts. But in the beginning, it was not so.

The dilemma in this situation is far more subtle than in the others, because it implies the need to heal a centuries old tradition of injustice. Well, how should we interpret the two statements, one about the hardness of their hearts, and the other about the way it was in the beginning? My Sisters and Brothers, I believe the most adequate interpretation is to say that the expression "hardness of your hearts" represented the cultural distortion of God's created given. The distortion was the unjust and self centered male domination, powerfully present in the Jewish culture at the time of Jesus. We find its reflection everywhere, including the language and expressions of the Scriptures. And we find its presence even today in our relationships.

In our time, we are trying to heal this cultural bias in the life of the church in many ways. One of them is that we try to make all things inclusive. But the true healer is genuine love, as it was in the beginning. This love does not say to the beloved: You are welcome in my life, but says instead: Let us make a new life together. And so, the happiness and the well-being of the other becomes the happiness and the well-being of oneself. In this way the true meaning of the created given is revealed to us: God created us in God's image: female and male God created us. For this reason, those who truly love each other build a new life together in God's loving presence. After all, to love God with all our hearts, and each other as ourselves sums up the Law and all the prophets. Amen.