

## Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time - October 6, 2024

### You Can't Love with a Heart of Stone

“It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a suitable **partner** for him.” See ladies it is biblical... Men can't do anything by themselves, we need help... We need partnership, we need relationships.

From the beginning of creation, God created us to be in **relationship**... We were created for two main relationships, relationship with God (vertical) and relationship with each other (horizontal). Think about the ten commandments, if you summarize them, they are to help us in our relationship with God (first 3) and our relationship with each other (last 7). Summarized as love God and love neighbor with Love being the link. **The original plan was for our relationships to be an example of love but as we are fallen, distortion entered the original plan.**

In the book of Genesis, we find the description of the original plan, a relationship between a man and a woman that was so synchronized that the two became one. In the gospel of Mark Jesus is asked about that relationship, because the relationship did not represent what was the original plan. His response is very telling, he stated that what was envisioned from the beginning was not being lived. That in the relationship of marriage, the two become one (flesh) to love each other and to love God. **He stated that Moses permitted divorce because of their hardness of hearts, there is the distortion.**

The expression because of their hardness of hearts catches my attention because the idea of a hardened heart or heart of stone comes up frequently in the scriptures. What is Hardness of Heart? Why and how do we get a Hardened Heart?

To say that humans are complex is an understatement. Think about our bodies and how we have defense mechanisms to protect us. If you feel threatened your body tenses up, your brain sends messages to release adrenaline to alert you, your heart rate raises, you make decisions in microseconds. All these are reactions to a potential threat for which your body is preparing for. You have probably heard stories of people not feeling pain, running faster, jumping higher to reach safety or to defend themselves. All because of the body's ability to defend or protect.

I just described physical reactions, but we also have psychological defense mechanisms. When you are hurt, disappointed, when you feel betrayed or discouraged, we build internal emotional walls to help us cope, to protect us from being hurt again. Hardness of the heart is one of these defense mechanisms. Usually, you have been hurt so deeply or distrust so much that your heart gets hard (figurative speaking). This can lead to a condition called **Broken Heart Syndrome**, which is a heart condition caused by stressful situations or extreme emotions. The condition creates a brief interruption to the way the heart pumps, although it doesn't affect the entire heart.

**Hardness of Heart** prevents us from building, nurturing or growing relationships. If I was betrayed and hurt that relationship has been damaged and I have built walls around my heart to prevent it from happening again, in a way to prevent Broken Heart Syndrome. The expression “**fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me**” is an example of our defense

mechanism. If I build this wall, if my heart is hardened, then you will not fool me. Yet the Lord tells us repeatedly that he does not want us to have hardened hearts or hearts of stone... **so I wonder why, if it is a defense mechanism?** I think it is because a heart of stone damages relationships, a heart of stone does not allow for forgiveness, because a heart of stone can't fully love.

The prophet Ezequiel tells us... I will change your hearts of stone and will turn them to flesh... St. Paul tells the Ephesians you need a heart of flesh, a compassionate heart, a heart that feels... St. Mark and St. Matthew tell us that Moses allowed divorce because of the hardness of heart, because from the beginning it was not so, it was not the plan.

There are many situations that harden our hearts and each one of us knows the specific situation that seems to have an impact on us building those walls. It could be in a horizontal relationship with a friend, family member, loved one, co-worker, acquaintance or even religious leader. Or the situation can impact our vertical relationship, the relationship with God, we might feel abandoned, lonely, betrayed, neglected. All these situations, scenarios can make us build walls in our relationships and eventually harden our hearts.

Yet in the gospel Jesus states that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven we need to be like children. **Why?** I think part is because children do not have hardened hearts, they have not had a chance to build walls around their hearts, they might not know what disappointment, betrayal, or a broken heart syndrome is. I know that it is easier said than done, it is difficult to let go, to be vulnerable, but after a while it becomes harder to carry around a hardened heart... **a heart of stone.**

**My personal challenge and my challenge to you is to look at your relationships, look at your relationship with God and your relationship with others, especially those that are more severed. What are those triggers that cause you to go into defense mode, what has given you a broken heart syndrome, what is making you build walls in your relationships? Bring that to the table, give it to the Lord and ask him to help you turn your heart of stone into a heart of flesh, because after all you can't love with a heart of stone.**