

The Bridegroom and the Bride

Isaiah 62:1-5
Psalm 96
1 Corinthians 12:4-11
John 2:1-11

There are two very significant images in Sacred Scripture that describe the Church—the Bride of Christ and the Body of Christ. These two images are never exclusive of one another, but always complimentary. On the Feast of the Holy Family, I preached on how all of us are called to be the Bride of Christ. This weekend, I want to explore the movement that happens in our spiritual lives as we mature in our role as the Bride of Christ and identify more and more with Christ Himself, as His Body. This maturing is very similar to the union that develops in marriage—a union described in the Book of Genesis and in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, which states that “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”¹

At the beginning of our spiritual journey, most of us identify more with being the Bride of Christ. We may not consciously think of our spiritual role using that particular image, but it manifests itself in some very important ways. For example, our focus is on our Bridegroom. We grow in an awareness of how He loves us and forgives us. With each passing day, we become more and more aware of how our Bridegroom cares for us, nurtures us, shares Himself with us, and helps us to be more than we could be by ourselves. As His Bride, we depend upon Him. He is our rock and strength. Our first reading today reflects this type of relationship with God, saying, “As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you” (Isaiah 62:5b).

As this relationship develops further, there is a union that occurs. It happens pretty subtly; we may not even notice that it’s happening. We begin identifying ourselves more with *Christ* than with the *image of His Bride*. We find ourselves experiencing a new comfort and ease with our union in Christ. Truly, the two are becoming one flesh. There are numerous signs that help indicate that we are making this transition in our spiritual lives; one such sign is Scripture.

How we read Sacred Scripture can be one of the indicators that our spirituality is moving from predominantly the Bride of Christ to the Body of Christ. When we read the stories in the Gospels, who do we identify with? A great Scripture example is the story of Bartimaeus in chapter ten of the Gospel of Mark. As I read the story, pay attention to whom in the story your heart most identifies.

As [Jesus] was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a sizable crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind man, the son of Timaeus, sat by the roadside begging. On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.” And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he kept calling out all the more, “Son of David, have pity on me.” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage; get up, he is calling you.” He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him in reply, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man replied to him, “Master, I want to see.” Jesus told him, “Go your way; your faith has saved you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.

-Mark 10:46-52

¹ Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7

For the majority of our spiritual lives, most of us will identify most readily with Bartimaeus. In other words, we understand ourselves as the Bride of Christ in need of healing, acceptance, and love. We will desire, as Bartimaeus did, to be healed and then to follow our Bridegroom wherever He goes. However, as we continue on our spiritual journey, we will find ourselves identifying more and more with *Christ* in this story. We will find *ourselves* asking the question Jesus asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” We will want to do all we can for other, for the Bride of Christ.

As we find ourselves identifying more with Christ, we notice a growing love for other people, even those we don’t know. We will become more and more aware of other people’s woundedness and suffering and feel an overwhelming compassion and tenderness for them. When we identify more with the Bride of Christ, we still need to find a lot of healing for our own woundedness. However, as the Body of Christ we want to share the healing we’ve received with others (the Bride of Christ) who are still hurting. An example might help clarify the distinction between these two aspects of spirituality.

Greg used to struggle with alcoholism. As he went through the 12-step program, he would often find himself tempted to drink. Sometimes the urge would be overwhelming. He would pray, even beg, for God to help him stay sober. By the time he completed the 12-step program, Greg was having very few inclinations to drink alcohol. In fact, he would find himself full of gratitude for the new freedom he felt from the temptations that used to torture him. Then one day, Greg got hit with a severe temptation to drink. More troubling than the urge to drink was the fact that he thought he had moved beyond such temptations.

Through some spiritual guidance, Greg began to realize that the temptations he felt were not from his own woundedness, but they were invitations from God to pray for others who were struggling with alcoholism. If Greg would have stayed focused on his own woundedness, he would have been identifying more with the Bride of Christ in need of healing, forgiveness, and love. As he began to identify more with Christ, it allowed him to love and intercede for others who are the Bride of Christ.

There are a lot of people in the world who need the witness Christ in very real ways. The earthquake in Haiti this week reminded us of that fact. As we grow spiritually, we begin to identify more and more with Christ; we begin to realize the meaning behind St. Teresa of Avila’s beautiful prayer, “Christ Has No Body.”

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ In what ways has God been inviting you lately to be Christ’s Body—His hands, feet, eyes, words, love, forgiveness, acceptance, care, compassion, etc. for other people?