

The Desert as Teacher

Hosea 2:16b, 17b, 21-22; II Corinthians 3:1b-6; Mark 2:18-22

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The survivors, after their passage through the desert, carried in their memories a new vision which they nurtured throughout their lives: Becoming free is a slow process, with no turning back, where God reveals Godself as passionate lover. When Hosea sees, many years afterwards, how the monarchy created a crisis by dividing communities and families— and how that dividedness affected even the love between spouses..., then the prophet rediscovers the spirituality of the desert precisely when he lives the crisis of marriage in his own flesh, through his wife's infidelity, within the decadent atmosphere of the monarchy which drags down the entire Jewish people.

Only the persevering love, faithful and tenacious, of Hosea can reclaim his wife's loving heart. Such fidelity transforms love into an authentic renovating force: a love which mirrors the faithful response of God, passionately concerned for his people!

How to live the love between spouses and within families, in fidelity? How to believe in a God who passionately seeks his people? How to love your own identity and culture when the force of the situation to which you live in bondage compels you to submit everything to change and loss, even those things you hold close as your personal "belongings," such as your family, such as the person you love, such as the faith you have received, such as your cultural identity— when these become things transitory, without firm basis?

The whole of migrant experience is a true desert. (I am not speaking in metaphors.) There is suffering, there is loss of faith, there are infidelities and families torn apart— the nearness of death is evident.

This experience deprives those who live it of nearly everything. They have to nurture a human and spiritual capacity for provisionality. They put their feelings to the test, they shake the very roots of their own faith. It isn't true that those who reach their goal have more faith than those who don't. Or that those who, once having swallowed a bitter draught, necessarily emerge purified. There is a shattering of the personality. You can no longer continue as you were. You have in your hands something that does not fit the way you have experienced life up till now. That's why you are tempted to "sew a piece of unshrunk cloth" on your life or to "pour" the new possibilities into old contexts, living them according to distorted visions and previous errors.

But here also is found open territory for the experience of faith...another stage is begun, a new opportunity, something new can happen. The discovery of a faithful love (of God, of family, of spouse, of community, of cultural inheritance) can provide a steady basis for the whole person... from here can arise a new man and a new woman.

"...I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart...I will espouse you to me forever, I will espouse you in right and justice, I will espouse you in fidelity...." (Hosea)