

October 23: Pierced for Love

'Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her.' (Eph. 5:22)

I will admit: facing my own brokenness in the Church and offering that vulnerability to fellow congregants is not always easy. I would prefer to pose 'resurrected', my wounds NOT visible. But the huge Crucifix that looms large over my parish sanctuary demands otherwise. He gave all to us, and so must we, one to another. In truth, His offering--a broken body and shed blood--is the very basis for our being a people. Through the Cross, Jesus pledges Himself to us forever. That pledge liberates our freedom to love one another.

I was greatly helped by Dr. Grant Pitre's book 'Jesus the Bridegroom.' In it, Pitre chronicles bridal imagery throughout Scripture, anchors it in Hebrew tradition, and emphasizes St. John's use of Jesus the Bridegroom; the Church, His bride. Startlingly, Pitre argues that God's spousal love for us is most pointedly revealed at Calvary. His piercing is the culmination of God's all-consuming desire to unite Himself to us forever. On Good Friday, Jesus married us.

Stay with me. Pitre claims that 'Jesus' wedding day is the day of His death, the day of His Crucifixion...' St. Paul's reference to the Church being prepared and washed and presented to Christ (Eph. 5) is rooted in 'the ancient Jewish bridal bath and wedding ceremony.' That washing had everything to do with the blood and water loosed in His dying. Jesus absolute self-giving on Calvary is His bridal pledge to us, a wedding vow born 'of a love as strong as death.' (Song of Sol 8:6)

St. Augustine goes further; he likens Calvary to God's spousal union with His people. 'Like a bridegroom Christ went forth from His nuptial chamber...He came to the marriage bed of the Cross and there, ascending it, consummated a marriage...He surrendered Himself to torment for His bride in a communication of love.' Christopher West quotes St. John Paul II who sums it up this way: 'The "sincere gift" contained in the Sacrifice of the Cross gives definitive prominence to the spousal meaning of God's love.'

When we gaze at Christ Crucified, remember: God loves us deeply, passionately, like a husband who dies to show his wife how much he loves her. Only this

Bridegroom lives, His sacrifice signaling the undying love to which He binds Himself to us forever. Lovestruck, might His people respond: 'We do.'

Please join us as we pray for:

1. Upper Midwest Region, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Jean Mersberger - Coordinator: For strength and vision for Jean, for existing groups and for new groups to be established.
2. Fondazione Novae Terrae (www.novaeterrae.eu) Italy: Strength and provision to fight for 'right to life' measures throughout Europe.
3. Harrisburg Diocese: Discernment for timing and team of new Living Waters group.

"Courage for Pastor Phil Strout (National Director of Vineyard USA), that he would ensure that the Church becomes a clear fountain of transformation for persons with same-sex attraction!"

October 24: Pierced by Love

'The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and Church.'
(CCC 1617)

Jesus gave all; on the Cross, He pledged Himself to us as Bridegroom to a Bride. There is no richer or deeper expression of spousal love than Jesus pouring out His life for us at Calvary. He forged a bond with us there that is like a marriage but actually much more. Our Creator vowed to make us His own through death; He released a river of blood, water and Spirit that has power to enable us to love Him in return.

He honors our choice. Will we dodge the Cross or look at it straight as God's 'yes' to an exclusive bond of love with us? That's the rub, that's why we remain at a safe distance. Spousal love requires faithfulness. And we tend toward other lovers. While revealing God's marriage pledge to us, the Cross also reveals our adulteries.

If so, don't run from your divided heart. In light of other lovers, ask yourself: 'Who really loves me? Who authentically cares for me, weeps for me, bears with me, fights for me because (s)he loves me—who I am—and not because of anything (s)he gets from it?'

Perhaps like me you can answer honestly: only Jesus loves me perfectly. The Cross invites us to return to that fountain of perfect love and to allow its flow to prime our hearts. Let tears of remorse flow: not the regret of having broken the rules (although we undoubtedly have), but rather the sorrow of having betrayed the best relationship we've ever had. Jesus espoused Himself to us at Calvary, and if we have said to yes to Him there, then His spousal light will reveal our infidelities.

Perhaps for the first time, Love invites you to look at your adulterous heart. Don't run or turn against yourself. Let the truth of His undying pledge of love for you recapture your heart. Enter again His tender and strong river: water to cleanse you, blood to give you new life, Spirit to revive your hurting soul. Remember, unlike a mere spouse, He is the Bridegroom who makes a way for willing hearts to become faithful lovers. He is making us His Bride, responsive and clean, transformed by Love alone.

Please join us as we pray for:

1. Eastern Midwest Region, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Amy Van Cott - Coordinator: Strength and vision for Amy, for existing groups and to see new groups established.
2. International Theology of the Body Congress (www.tobcongress.com): Advance for beautiful teachings of John Paul II throughout the world.
3. RHN: Prayer for Anne Paulk, as Executive Director, protection and provision for her and her three sons and extended family.

"Courage for Pope Francis, that he would ensure that the Church becomes a clear fountain of transformation for persons with same-sex attraction!"

October 25: Flesh of Our Flesh

‘The bride belongs to the bridegroom.’ (Jn 3:29)

We who welcome the Cross as the sign and seal of God’s unfailing love for us welcome Jesus as Lover. Calvary is the means by which He betroths Himself to us. His broken flesh is the means by which He incarnates Himself into our flesh—the whole of our humanity. Blood tore the veil of sin, water cleanses us for Him, His Spirit indwells us and makes us new. We are His, He is ours.

St. Paul recognized this profoundly. He addressed the sexual impurities of the Corinthians as the spiritual adulteries that they were. ‘The Lord is meant for the body, and the body for the Lord’ (1Cor 6:13) he exclaimed, then forbade them from spiritually bonding with false lovers as to prevent them from breaking one-Spirit communion with God. He reminds us that Christians—purchased by Jesus through His blood, and raised with Him through His Spirit—now belong to God in our very bodies. His faithful love commands a faithful, bodily response to Him.

I just met with an Archbishop whose eyes conveyed the depth of his spousal bond with Jesus. He wanted to know more about Living Waters but actually I needed to know something from him. As we shared with the Church leader about how we minister to persons coming out of deep sexual sin and wounding, he replied: ‘The key to all of this is intimacy with Jesus.’ Enough said. In exchange for all my words, he summarized the essence of what we and all healers do (or should do): invite broken ones into the Cross—bridal intimacy that has power to transform the most sin-wracked frames into vessels of honor.

Many of us have served couples whose one-flesh unity was ruptured by sexual infidelity; some of us have been those couples. The beauty of yielding our bodies to give love highlights the damage done by breaking vows with our bodies. If we can see and ache for the infidelities we have committed with each other, might we not ask God for the grace to feel the damage done when we as mere creatures violate our spousal pledge to the Creator?

His intimate love invites us to surrender our heart afresh to Him, especially when native lust tempts us to wander. As we grieve over sin, let us also lament the spiritual adultery which resists communion with the very One who is our cure. His

very Presence is the antidote for the addictive soul; He alone composes us and invites us to rest once more in perfect love.

'The knowledge that God is truly with us—that it is possible to be in familiar communion with Him—is the primary need of every lonely, suffering soul. Our work as ministers is that of praying "Come Lord Jesus" then inviting each one into the healing Presence.' Leanne Payne

Please join us as we pray:

1. Ohio, Crispin & Annelise DeBellis - Coordinators: For strength and vision for Cris & Annelise, for existing groups and to see new groups established. Blessings on partnership with their church to establish more Living Waters groups throughout Ohio.
2. Aguas Vivas: Cordoba, Argentina, Maria-Innes- Coordinator: For Lord's guidance, strength and protection as they finish their first Aguas Vivas (LW) group.
3. RHN: Prayer for wisdom, discernment and protection for RHN board members: Andrew Comiskey; Stephen Black; Karen Booth; Robert Gagnon; Denise Schick; Jason Thompson.

"Courage for Reverend Justin Welby (Archbishop of Canterbury), that he would ensure that the Church becomes a clear fountain of transformation for persons with same-sex attraction!"

October 26: Faithful Lovers

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...Love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Matt. 22:37, 39)

Cultivating undivided devotion to God underlies faithful human relationships. Any adulterer knows this. Those persons whom God has graced with the courage to face the devastation of breaking both marital vows and the heart of one’s spouse become reduced to divine love. Both victim and perpetrator know that the only hope for authentic restoration lies in God.

Repentance is not turning to a set of rules—most know which ones they have already broken. We turn to a relationship—the Relationship—the only One we can trust. Real moral healing must involve the readiness to rely on God alone. He awaits our desperation: ‘Living Water’ only saturates dry broken ground. God bears with us until we recognize the futility of false lovers, coupled with the devastation wrought by our wanderings.

God waits. The marvel of Divine Mercy is this: He who deserves our undivided love simply because He is God will employ our adulterous hearts to bring us back to Himself, back to Love. Misbegotten relationships will always fail us. In His exquisite accommodation to our foolishness, God uses moral failure to anchor us in His unfailing love. Then we can begin the slow and splendid task of learning how to love others faithfully. Founded on Him, fearful of unholy fire, we can become faithful lovers.

Seeking to give God complete devotion is the basis our marriage. Annette and I had no illusions about the native quality of our self-giving. My homosexually addictive background, coupled with her sexual abuse and resulting defenses became our broken ground for drinking in rain from heaven. What else could we do but love Him in return, worshipping Him in gratitude with all our heart, mind and soul? He gave us love with which to care deeply for one another. We sealed that love with our bodies, a vow we have not broken in 33 years. The faithful love of God makes us faithful.

*‘As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.’
(Isa. 62:5)*

Please join us as we pray:

1. Appalachian Region, Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia, Dean Greer - Coordinator: For new regional leadership to be identified and raised-up, for existing groups and to see new groups established.
2. Aguas Vivas: Santiago, Chile, Ruth & Ignacio - Coordinators: Thanksgiving for their participation in the Aguas Vivas Training in July; for guidance and provision in order to run an Aguas Vivas group.
3. RHN: New Pathways, Elton Moose, Springfield, OH: Financial needs and new board members. Prodigal Ministries, Jerry Armelli, Cincinnati, OH: For the fulfillment of the Lord's purposes for the ministry.

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