

An irony of our modern times; loneliness and isolation are serious situations in our world and in our country. The former Surgeon General of the United States, Vivek Murphy, said that loneliness and isolation are an epidemic. People who experience this profound loneliness and isolation risk a premature death, as much as smoking 15 cigarettes per day; there is increased risk of heart disease, stroke, dementia, and there are repercussions to our immune system. Loneliness and isolation are bad for us.

Ironic because of all our advances in communications; with our ability to talk with people, even video talk with them, in real time across this world, we can share our lives with so many other persons and...we are not making connections. We may have likes and followers, but we lack connection, good honest connections.

There is no one reason, but a whole host of them. One can be our turn to more individualistic and narcissistic attitudes. We want to live our own lives as we choose; we don't want to feel pressure to conform to others and their own values and ethics. We don't want to commit, either to relationships or organizations, and so our ability to network and build connections falters. We also can be scared. And we also create categories to divide us: political, gender, racial; which only keep us apart.

Yet, we thirst for connection. We humans are meant to be in community, to have connections. It is part of our nature.

Jesus connecting with this Samaritan woman at the well was not supposed to happen. There are many categories that society created to keep them apart: Jew and Samaritan; Male and Female; Sinner and Holy.

Jesus ignores these categories, these abstractions, these creations and sees a person in need; a lonely person, an isolated person. He sees a sister if you will. He breaks through these categories; he ignores her attempts to put up barriers and gets to her heart.

It changes everything. Her sense of self seems changed. She becomes connected to her community. She experiences acceptance.

And we must realize that this is not merely Jesus being good; Jesus expresses and lives out God's will. God desires us. God desires us to be connected; to God and to each other.

We walk with our Elect and Candidates as they come closer to the Easter Sacraments.

These men and women, including our young ones, have heard God call out to them, in some way; and they responded.

let anything divide and separate. So today, they will be encouraged to scrutinize their lives...what inhibits the connection with God? Sinfulness, fear, lack of understanding of God, of humanity, of themselves. What barriers do they place that hurts their connection with God?

Yet, this is also for us. What continues to inhibit our own growth as disciples? What keeps our connection to God, with God from becoming stronger? Our sinfulness, our lack of understanding, our fears? What obstacles do we put up to keep God out? To keep others out of our lives?

The deeper our connection to God, to community and to each other, deepens our strength to endure when hardships come.

The deeper our connection to God, to church, to each other, provides hope to us when we find ourselves lost and trapped.

A deeper and livelier faith opens our minds to greater possibilities, no longer bound to narrow ways of thinking and acting.

Our Sacraments themselves encourage us to deepen these connections, to see new possibilities. We see and believe the Son of God in bread and wine. Therefore we can see ways to forgive, ways to give, ways to be kind, ways to trust...that exceed what maybe the rest of society says.

This past week I was reminded of the power of connection and hospitality. A person I respect shared how years ago she came to this parish with her infant son, having recently moved to Reno. She was alone with him at mass. He had fallen asleep in the pew, but it was time for communion. She did not want to disturb him, but wanted to go to communion. Some ladies in the adjacent pews assured her they would look after him, and that she could go receive communion. It was that moment she knew she was in the right parish. It was a moment of connection.

We come to mass and we have the opportunity to connect with Jesus in the Sacraments, in the Scripture and in the community that gathers with us. We need to be open to that now.

And right now there could be a moment of connection waiting to happen, right in the pews around us: a family with young kids who may be a bit boisterous, how can we help?

A new person who has never been here before, how can we greet them?

People around us in the pews praying, how can we support them?

God connects with us so that as Jesus we can connection with others; if we open our hearts to it.