

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes
Santa Barbara, CA**

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B – October 6, 2012

Kathleen Dewey

**Reflects on Gen 2:18-25; Hebrews 2:9-12;
Mark 10: 2-16**

The theme of marriage, of being one flesh, of divorce, and adultery are dominant in today's readings. However, that is not what I plan to speak about. I am divorced and annulled, forbidden to remarry in the Catholic Church without permission. And I regret every bit of that. I am not yet the person to preach on these subjects, but for one thought with which I'll conclude the homily.

A few years ago, a colleague of mine at Santa Barbara City College asked me to substitute in her Sacred Literature class. The class was studying the creation story from Genesis.

Different religions, cultures, tribes, and regions use their creation stories to explain who they are, explain their beliefs, and tell how they came to be. There is almost an imperative for people to have a sense of belonging to one another, and to explain themselves to others. This is a good thing – to know you belong. We belong to God; we belong to a family; we belong with this church community.

What history does is explain us to us. The Church of the Beatitudes keeps a history. We have our own creation story. We have records that show how many we were, who they were, and remind us of what we were thinking, even before Suzanne was ordained.

Having done quite a bit of genealogy research, I've learned how important it is to know from whom we come. I knew it when I began to cry, finally standing alone at the grave of my great great grandmother in a neglected cemetery in El Paso. I knew it when I found that I could barely find a male person in my Kelly family who wasn't named Daniel, in honor of the great Irish Catholic hero, Daniel O'Connell. I knew none of this when I named my youngest

son ... Daniel. I thought it was after my dad or my brother, both of whom have the middle name ... Daniel.

So these are important stories for families, institutions, religions. That night when I substituted at City College, we were all storytellers.

We sat on the floor, in a circle, with the lights low and began to read creation stories. One we read was a modern version from our African-American culture, written in 1927 by James Weldon Johnson. I want you to hear his version of that day when God created humankind.

*God looked on His world
And God said, "I'm lonely still."
Then God sat down
God thought and thought
Till He thought, "I'll make me a man!"
Up from the bed of the river
God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river
He kneeled Him down;
And there the Great God Almighty,
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far
corner of the the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of
His hand -
This Great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till He shaped it in His own image;
Then into it He blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.*

I'm sure you've come across people who want

to understand the mystery of God by giving her human qualities. We find that in our first reading and in the poem you just heard. We want to create God in our image. In both versions we find a God who is emotional, just as we are. Surrounded by all the beauty and majesty of planet Earth, he's still lonely. In Genesis God understands our need for the love and companionship of one another.

We also find a god who is humble, toiling on his knees in the mud of a river bank, and using a very hands-on creation in the Genesis version. This same god is powerful – called “... the Great God Almighty ...” For the writers, power is not lost in any human qualities.

We can see the mix of human and divine qualities in the conclusion of Mark's gospel, the story of Jesus calling the children to him. Jesus is seated, bringing himself down to the level of the children. Parents have brought their children to be “touched” by Jesus, - “touched”, that's all. Jesus not only reaches out and touches the children: he blesses them, embraces their innocence, and lays his hands on the children. With a touch, Jesus claims the children as his own.

Touch can be a sacred gesture. We touch one another with a sacred gesture when we anoint loved ones in their illness and dying; we anoint one another at the Easter Vigil. At ordinations, the laying on of hands is the solemn moment when the people of God bless and affirm the call of the Holy Spirit, a sign of sending the ordained forth with our love and support. In a few minutes, we will turn touch into a sacred gesture as we wish one another peace in our lives.

Peace be with all of you!

And now my few thoughts from that theme of marriage and divorce:

This is the 21st century. Divorce should not exist to serve the needs of the civil authorities. Annulment should not exist at all.

Thinking about divorce needs to begin with the couple as the center. They made the mutual decision to marry with the intention to love and serve one another for life, to be sacrament in the world. At some point, they realize that the marriage is no longer a sacrament. This is the couple's decision. It needs no ratification by a court or by a faceless church committee. Our place is to ask ourselves what we can do to be God's love for the couple at this time in their lives.

A friend of mine suggested the answer. A ritual. Whatever the divorce experience was for a couple, feeling God's blessing is just as important at the separation as at the joining. I don't know exactly what the ritual might look like. Certainly the community of family and friends who gathered to bless the marriage would gather again to bless the parting and the beginning of life anew. The community might form a circle with hands raised in blessing. Perhaps a sacred touch of anointing. We might hear words such as forgiveness, acceptance, understanding, compassion, respect, prayer for one another.

Free of barriers from the past, two people are ready to journey on a new path, knowing that God's love is never conditional.

The Church of the Beatitudes is a good place to begin this ritualistic thinking.