

May 14, 2017

"Heavenly Fathers, Earthly Mothers"

First Reading ~ John 14: 1-10

Don't let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith in me as well. In God's house there are many dwelling places; otherwise, how could I have told you that I was going to prepare a place for you? I am indeed going to prepare a place for you, and then I will come back to take you with me, that where I am, there you may be as well. You know the way that leads to where I am going."

Thomas replied, "But we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?" Jesus told him, "I am the Way- I am the Truth, and I am the Life. No one comes to Abba God but through me. If you really knew me, you would know Abba God also. From this point on, you know Abba God and you have seen God." "Rabbi," Philip said, "show us Abba God, and that will be enough for us."

Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and still you don't know me? Whoever has seen me has seen Abba God. How can you say, 'Show us the Heavenly Parent?' Don't you believe that I am in Abba God and God is in me?"

Second Reading ~ adapted from Father Richard Rohr in Beyond Gender

What we are searching for in any authentic male or female spirituality is the good and healthy meaning of maleness or femaleness, each being one half of that mystery of Divinity (Genesis 1:26-27). Is there any essential or cross-cultural nature to the one half of the image of God that we call masculine or feminine? Do men approach spirituality differently than women, have different starting places and different symbols? My studied opinion is that we do have quite different entrance points, but nevertheless, end up much the same, because the goal is identical -- union, divine union, where we are [a part of] One who is neither male nor female, but "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Anthropologists suggest that the majority of male initiation rites were concerned with leading the young male on journeys of powerlessness, whereas female fertility and puberty rites had the exact opposite function: to sign the young girl with emblems of power and dignity. The rites gave them both what they needed to get started, but from opposite starting places. The male could not be trusted with power unless he had made journeys of powerlessness; the female would not even know she had power unless she was taught and encouraged to trust it.

This could seem shocking, but read the four Gospels and note Jesus' consistently distinctive attitude toward the two genders. He is invariably calling the woman upward: "Rise, go your way; your faith has restored you to health!" (Luke 8:48) and "Neither do I condemn you" (John 8:11). To a woman who has just spoken "up" and "back" to Jesus, he says, "Woman you have great faith!" (Matthew 15:28).

Conversely, he is steadily calling the males downward: "Zacchaeus, come down!" (Luke 19:5); "If anyone wants to be first, he must be last" to the Twelve (Mark 9:35); and "Get behind me, Satan" to "the prince of the apostles" who wants to avoid suffering (Mark 8:33). Our selective memory is really rather amazing, that we have not noted this clear pattern in the Scriptures. Could that be what we mean by patriarchy?