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**Reflection for November 2020**  
**Theme: Our unfaithfulness- God's faithfulness**

**Read: Hosea ch.1-3.**

**A Reflection:**

*Before the lockdown, a regular day had almost 200 visitors of other faiths coming to the Sacred Heart Cathedral at New Delhi. After a darshan at the Hanuman temple and ardas at the Gurudwara nearby, they would trace their steps to the church barefooted, seeking solace and solitude. The one thing that struck almost all of them as soon as they entered the church was an unmistakable sense of “peace”, a peace that ironically made them restless enough to ask... What makes this place so peaceful?*

*To answer this question and many more that would soon follow, our office started the Table Ministry. Two volunteers would sit at a Table outside the church to welcome our guests, offer a guided tour of the church and in turn share with them the kerygma. Those interested could help themselves to the free prayer cards and sign up for a correspondence course.*

*I remember a beautiful and humbling experience I had during my initial days of sitting at the Table Ministry. I was new to the office, full of zeal and full of naivety. I had rehearsed a few lines and was ready to wow the first group of guests to walk in. I was praying they would be young college girls and the good Lord brought to me a beaming bunch! While most of them were feasting on the prayer cards at the Table, asking me repeatedly if it was really free or not, one of them stood silently, eagerly waiting for me to speak. And so I started my well-rehearsed tour- I explained how God made Man, Man moved away from God and so God sent His Son to save the World. Pointing to the large bronze crucifix, characteristic of the Delhi Cathedral, I explained why Jesus had to die for us. As we stepped outside, the quiet girl with the bright eyes turned to me and said, “Christianity is so different from other religions.” I was intrigued by her observation. “Why do you say so?” “Well, in every religion, Man goes out in search for God, Christianity is the only religion where God came looking for us!”*

*In that moment I was humbled. I had only narrated a by-hearted script, but she had told me an eternal Truth!*

As we read the poignant poetry of the prophet who lives out a parable and a prophecy in person, one truth that rings clear is this- God Loves us! Unfaithful though we be, God infinitely, madly, deeply loves us.

The book of Hosea opens with God asking something of Hosea. He is asked to take a wife, an adulterous one at that! And we see that Gomer represents an idolatrous Israel who is unfaithful in the marriage-like covenant that God has made with the chosen nation. But why would God ask Hosea to actually marry an unfaithful woman, just to draw a parallel between Gomer and Israel? Hosea may have preferred if God gave him an instruction for someone else, but this is how God always works. Before we use the double-edged sword to cut someone else, it must cut us first. After all, our life better conveys the great truths of God, than our words, like the Cross speaks more about God's love than anything else. God puts Hosea into a place where he feels first-hand what God feels- and it didn't feel good. *What if God demands something like this from us or asks us to swap places with the people we serve, particularly the ones we least identify with?*

Hosea and Gomer would have promised eternal love and devotion to each other (the covenant). The scripture does not tell us why Gomer leaves her husband and that is the brilliance of the text, it wants us to attribute the reasons. She may have quit in difficult circumstances or probably out of boredom, or a feeling of neglect, or a sense of need, or simply a moment of weakness. Sadly, we sometimes have the same inexcusable reasons for wandering away from God too. Sure, we may not be worshipping other gods, but can we be truthful that we have not flirted with the world and have been unfaithful in little things? Do we find ourselves torn between God's will and ours?

Some theologians have held the opinion that Hosea's story cannot be real because God would not ask a man to marry an unfaithful woman. But the truth is if Hosea's story cannot be true then neither is the story of salvation real because that is exactly what Christ did and is doing for us.

**“Behold, I will allure her I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her there..” (2:14)**

Despite Israel's unfaithfulness, God still has a plan to save them. Notice, Israel has shown no sign of change or remorse, yet God will save them not because they have repented but because of his own mercy. God goes out in pursuit of us like a lover, alluring us back into his love, no wonder the poet called him the 'Hound of Heaven'.

There is something remarkable about these words. It is not “I will force her” but “I will allure her”. And allure us where? Into the desert! Desert is the place where

everything is laid bare, where we experience everything in its extremities, be it outside in the nature or inside the deepest recesses of our heart. The devil allures us with honeyed words and baits of pleasure into pleasant places but God into the desert, no wonder we naturally tend to the fabricated lie than the bare truth.

There is something precious about these words- “I will allure her”. *Recount the time when God allured you into your vocation. What was your life like before and after? What is the ‘desert’ into which he has allured you into? Are you ‘bared’ enough to hear his tender words?*

### **You will call Me “My Husband” (2:16)**

God’s allurement is not to “use” as the devil does, but to genuinely restore the intimate-love relationship with his people. He longs for the day when his people too would respond to his call of love with a marriage-like commitment, fidelity and love for Him.

But a marriage is set to be between two equals, so God is really stooping so low so as to equate himself with us!

*Recount your own decision to say, ‘yes’ to be the bride of Jesus for life, and your espousal with Jesus in Religious Profession; Spend some moments recalling what have been your joys and disappointments of this espousal with Jesus.*

### **And no longer call me “My Baal” (2:16)**

Shocking that the Israelites addressed Yahweh as Baal! It’s as if the attributes of Yahweh are being credited to Baal! Imagine in a marriage, where one addresses the other not by his/ her name but by the name of a lover! It is like adding insult to injury. Not only am I being unfaithful, but I am also reminding you of my allegiance to someone else!

Could this be happening with us? Of course we would never call Jesus by any other name! But the name represents the person. *Could we have harboured wrong notions or ideas of God that only insult him or worse break his heart? Do we have an image of a punitive God? A God who exacts rather than loves us? Do we really believe that God would go after me like Hosea goes after his wife? That God allures me? Do I understand the depth of his love and the price he has paid for me?*

It is interesting to note that in Hebrew, the name “Baal” comes from the word “Master” and the two words sound alike. In fact some bibles translate this verse as “no longer call me ‘My Master’”. It is the idols of the world that want a master-slave relationship with us, not one of freedom like God wants! Remember as in the incident

mentioned in the beginning- in all other belief systems we go out in search of god, but it is only the God of Jesus who comes looking out for us.

We see a glimpse of what this master- slave relationship can look like in the parable of the Prodigal son where the older son blurts out “All these years I have been slaving for you.” *Do we at times feel like we have “slaved” in our Religious life and have end up with a rotten deal? Have we become bitter, unforgiving, jealous, self-righteous or angry as we look back at our lives?*

There is a vast difference between the relationship of a husband and wife and that of a Master and a slave. Are we living the latter when we were invited to the former?

In all sincerity, God is the rightful owner of the title of Master (Lord), yet it is not what he was looking for. God did not want a fear- based relationship with his people, despite their continued unfaithfulness. Jesus takes forward this very idea with his disciples when he says, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:15) There are no secrets in friendship and certainly no secrets in marriage. God is longing to communicate to us if only we be willing to listen to him. *It is intimacy he seeks not ‘usefulness’.*

**“I will betroth you to Me forever: you shall know the Lord.” (2:19)**

Taking the marriage symbolism forward, God assures us that we will be betrothed to him *forever*. This is not a fleeting fling but a marriage that is made to last forever. Also, ‘knowing’ in scripture, as we know, is not so much an intellectual knowledge but an experiential one. God invites us into a personal experience of him. In fact later in chapter 4, God states “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”. So this personal experience of God is not just an added bonus, but the basic throb of our Religious life. We perish for want of knowing him. Ultimately, as J.I. Parker says in his book *Knowing God* “Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord.”

Further questions for us to reflect upon-

1. What is our image of God like? Has the reading of Hosea changed/ reinforced that image in any way?
2. Do I feel like the ‘elder brother’ in my Religious Life? If so, what may I do to change that?

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