

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas  
Text: Is. 63:7-14  
Theme: "The Rhythm of Love"  
December 26, 2010

There are certain natural rhythms in the world that are so common, we hardly notice them. If we go to the ocean, no one ever expects the waves to cease rolling. I never get up on Sunday morning and wonder if the sun will rise as I drive to church. These are just the things we come to expect because they are so consistent and so true to form.

The Plain White T's have a song called the Rhythm of Love which I really like, but the problem is, the Plain White T's are good musicians, but not very good theologians. Whenever I listen to that song, I always think what a great theological work it could have been if only they had not presented love as an emotion. You and I and anyone who has been married for more than 20 years know that love is not an emotion but an action. Some of us may enjoy swaying in the moonlight and having mushy feelings but the foundation of love is not a feeling but a promise. Either you keep your promise to cherish one another or you don't. If you cease cherishing, you have ceased loving and the promise is broken.

That does not mean that you always like what the other person says or does. But if you have committed to that person, you stick with him or her through everything he says and does; right or wrong; good or bad. Marriage is not about how you feel but about what you promised. That kind of commitment is the real rhythm of love.

Over the course of years, things between people can be wonderful and things can be awful but that is the rhythm of love. I have often told Dänya that it is our choice to either be miserable or happy with each other but we are together through all the various rhythms until death do us part. That started out as a promise in 1986. Some might say it's a threat now. We get that rhythm from God.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of that rhythm of love between God and us. The people are returning from exile in Babylon and Isaiah talks about the Exodus. The rhythm is this. The people sin and God responds with teaching until the people learn and get back on the right track until they sin again.

See nothing is accidental or happenstance in the history of God and his people. We didn't just happen to wander in the dessert for 40 years and it wasn't because Moses refused to ask directions. It was because that was how long it took for the people to learn to trust God. Once they learned, they entered the Promised Land. Likewise, the exile to Babylon was not by chance. If the people wanted to play with false gods, then they could spend about 70 years in the land of false gods and learn what they had with the one true God. Once they learned, they went back to the Promised Land. That is the rhythm of love.

God leads this dance and it always involves doing whatever helps us stay faithful to him and thus maintaining a firm grasp on eternal life. Primarily, like marriage, it revolves around repentance and forgiveness. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God would not rest until our salvation was secure. Satan would not be allowed to possess us.

The Introit for today says:

When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.

God would not allow us to stay in exile and so sent his own son to the cross to pay for our sins. He instituted the rhythm of love that would be a hallmark of our existence on this earth. We wander away and God calls us back. Like marriage; people move apart and then come back together. There are times when it seems as though you live and breathe as one and times when you feel distant and disconnected from one another. Likewise with God: there are times when we feel as though we could reach out and touch his face and times when we do not hear him and feel totally removed

from his presence. During those times when I do not feel God's presence, I come here. I listen for his word in the readings, in the hymns and in the liturgy. I remember the Baptismal waters that wash over me. I receive his body and blood and slowly I am drawn back into his presence.

We will not be returned from this exile until Christ returns. We journey now on our own exodus from hell to heaven. Jesus paid the price for our entry into paradise but we are still on the journey. As we journey, there is a rhythm to our lives that cannot be denied. Even as the sun rises and sets, even as the waves roll in one after another, so the rhythm of love continues in our lives. We walk on the path of life and veer off to one side or the other. Like pigeons following bread crumbs, some shiny bauble catches our eye and we forget about our Lord. Off we go in search of winning or pleasure or relaxation or worldly success or greed. God walks with us and gently pulls us back onto his path through repentance and forgiveness. He nourishes his bride, the Church, with his body and blood. He washes us clean in Baptismal water and he moves us ever closer to eternal life with him.