

...BRIDGES... Number 6, 2007: "We Need Each Other"

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So that these up-dates can easily be printed out and displayed on church bulletin boards or shared with friends, every BRIDGES that you have received so far has been a self-contained, one-page item. To meet this parameter, I sometimes have had to revise the text many times and/or format the page in unusual ways, with small type and tiny margins. However, try as I might, I have been unable to make my hand-written text on this year's Synod fit on a single page. Thus, although BRIDGES 5 ends with what may sound like a "proper" conclusion, I have decided to continue and complete my reflections on this May's Synod in this up-date. Thus, I may be able to expand on the Dutch representative's declaration that "we need you" in a pertinent way.

When I asked our guest from Britain for the exact wording of his comment about God's merciful guidance, he admitted that he could not reconstruct his remarks. "In Britain, our views of marriage and the family are rather different," he added, without identifying the specifics of that incongruity. I suspect that as you readers think of your own experiences with the fragility of human relationships, some of you will have an intuitional sense of the nature of those differences. Thus, instead of speculating about this matter, I will supplement my previous considerations of this year's Synod by following our Dutch friend's lead and declaring "we need each other."

This sense had begun to grow within me as the Synod proceeded, and was further confirmed by the content of the opera that we "internationals" attended together on Saturday evening. As the fragmented relationships that permeate the story of Samson and Delilah appeared before us as so many shadows on the stage, I was amused by the fact that our consideration of marriage and divorce was ending with that particular drama. However, I soon realized that the opera served as a tangible example of the reality that some members of the Synod had expressed the preceding evening; i.e., that human relationships are inherently complex.

Thus, I would venture to say that we partners in international dialogue need each other when we are considering relational matters. We need the Korean vision, which calls us to devote serious attention to the "conserve-ation" of marriage. Yet, we also need the British awareness that guidelines regarding this sacred institution ought to be modeled on God's gracious care. And we need the middle way of Czech Christians who hold that we must not give in to the tendency to

treat relationships with a consumerist mentality that views people as interchangeable commodities, but who are equally aware that God's merciful ways are especially salient in the midst of human brokenness. We need each other so that we can thoughtfully consider whether and how the personal trauma that divorce tends to precipitate can itself serve as a context in which God's grace may be made manifest through healing care.

The power and possibility of grace within brokenness took a different, but related, turn when one of our guests presented the President of the Synod with a candle that contained the logo and emblem of his denomination. The President received the candle graciously and placed it in the center of the table, where it eventually was lit by a member of the Synod's Presidium. Nothing about those acts appeared to be remarkable, but I had a sense that this was an extraordinary act, insofar as candles lit in churches are a part of a Catholic tradition that remains rather alien to Protestants here.

When I saw the candle burning brightly on the communion table the next morning at the Synod's concluding worship service, I thought that I had misinterpreted the significance of the candle. However, the President of the Synod openly acknowledged that it had been difficult to agree to use the candle in the worship setting. Yet, together we were able to step beyond conventional practice and let the light of God's presence shine in our midst. If grace can break through centuries of tradition that have grown out of brokenness, can it not also remold the fragmentation that is dramatically symbolized by divorce, but may persist in more familial and social settings than we tend to imagine? That is the hopeful question that the Synod posed for me....