

Kevin Nadolski, OSFS  
March 25, 2007: Fifth Sunday in Lent (“A” Readings)  
Our Lady, Queen of Peace

Few things could be harder than when our loved ones let us down. Let’s think about it. It is really a heart-breaker when:  
Our children—no matter how old they are—let us down by their painfully bad choices or patterns of challenged living.  
The people who say they love us stop loving us.  
Our church leaders expose themselves as fraudulent.  
Our parents emerge for us as people who just weren’t what we made them out to be.

Yes, it is a huge let down. What could be harder? I am wondering in light of today’s gospel if there is something more challenging. What happens to us when we experience that God has let us down?

I ask that question in light of today’s gospel where we see Martha, friend of Jesus, disciple of Jesus, one who addresses him with a divine title, asks: “Lord, if only you had been here our brother would not have died.” I think she is feeling let down by God—and she is not alone.

When our prayers are answered—the we would like; when we are sick and seemingly in curable, when our loved ones die; when our relationships end; when our future looks like its crumbling, and when we know our present life really is...don’t we feel let down by God.

I suppose we could say that Jesus rose to the occasion and fixed Martha’s pain. He rose Lazarus from the dead. But, Lazarus died a second time. Did Martha feel let down again by God, especially after God did not raise him a second time? Where did Martha go with her pain that second time? I hope she went to her sister Mary or one of her friends from the Temple. It seems to me that when God let’s us down, he let’s us down...easily into the arms of a loved one.

Do we let God let us down into the arms of others who can and will take care of us? It is hard to do, and it takes one of the most important Lenten muscles: Vulnerability.

Vulnerability comes from the Latin word, meaning “wound.” The place where we hurt and experience pain. We are not meant to hurt and be in pain alone. God let’s us down into the arms of others who care for us. Yet, we are called to be honest enough to share our wounds, to not let pride or fear of being perceived as needy or weak get in the way.

Vulnerability is not weakness; it is strength—and possibly the strongest act a human can make: To be vulnerable. Isn’t it true that we were saved by an act of vulnerability on the cross? I think that sometimes we think that laying your life down for a friend or picking up a cross means that we become martyrs. Doesn’t it mean, in the first place, that we become vulnerable enough to let ourselves down to be held or picked up by another.

Jesus was so fully human that he became divine on the cross. And, what got him to this moment in his life and our salvation was his strength to be vulnerable.

Lent may begin with a focus on me, but it ends on the focus on the “we.”

My prayer, fasting, and almsgiving must lead to our celebration.

During Lent, we do well to **reflect on sin, especially social sin, so as to rejoice in social celebration, especially in the new life of our elect!**

This week’s issue of the Sudan Tribune paints a horrific example of people being let down.

March 20, 2007 (KHARTOUM) — Two Sudanese women have been sentenced to death by stoning for adultery after a trial in which they had no lawyer and which used Arabic, not their first language, the rights group Amnesty International said. Sadia Idriss Fadul was sentenced on February 13 and Amouna Abdallah Daldoum on March 6 and their sentences could be carried out at any time, the London-based group said in a statement released late on Monday. North Sudan implements Islamic sharia law. "The women had no lawyer during their trial and were not able to defend themselves, as their first languages are those of their ethnic groups," Amnesty said. Both women are from non-Arab tribes but the proceedings were in Arabic and no interpreter was provided, Amnesty said. Their trial took place in central Al Gezira state.

"One of the women, Sadia Idriss Fadul, has one of her children with her in prison," Amnesty said. Faysal el-Bagir, a Sudanese human rights activist, said sentences of death by stoning were rare, "but we have heard that in this area there have been other such judgments."

The male accused in Fadul’s case was let off because there was not enough evidence against him. Witnesses are usually required to gain a conviction and forensic tests are not normally used in such cases.

These two women have been let down into the arms of their global brothers and sisters to care for them, and the other women like them, and their children and brothers who are unjustly persecuted.

Yesterday’s UN vote to impose sanctions on Iran will let down countless women and children and poor men, not the leaders such sanctions will impact. Will we embrace these folks with our arms?

It is incredibly hard when our loved ones let us down. It is even harder when God let’s us down. Do we have the faith to let God let us down into the care of each other? If so, we are ready for a great social celebration!