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“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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A Lenten reflection: Can we tell the truth about ourselves? We hear all the time about *stress* in our wider culture. By stress I mean some form of overload on our mental, psychological and spiritual being.

Stress is having too many responsibilities and burdens for our daily life-situation. It is have too many worries and preoccupations. It's feeling too much pressure which, over time, wears us down, affecting our health and general well-being.

Think about the pressure in our culture to produce *bottom line* results.

Take the business world. In the world of sales, companies offer incentives for achievement but, so often, when the goals are reached, rather than rewarding the sales person, they raise the bar, making even greater demands.

In effect, management tightens the margins on the sales team, creating a work environment where, increasingly, every ounce of production is squeezed out of them. Where's the joy and satisfaction for a job well done? And of course, it's all driven by profits and insatiable greed.

Then there's the world of sport—both college and professional. In both arenas, there's excessive pressure to win. That's why it is often times so hard to have a *clean* program at the college level—where *clean* means not violating any of the detailed guidelines for recruitment. And it is clearly why there's such a high turnover with coaches at the professional level.

Being real. However, there is a further form of stress in our culture that's more subtle. It's the stress of feeling, all the time, like we have to give the appearance of being happy and successful. Much of our social life plays out around these sorts of expectations. At least this is the perception we think we have to project.

Without becoming too sappy or melancholic, we need to be able to tell the truth about how we are feeling, about how we are doing. Certainly, we don't have to act superficially happy and successful all the time—particularly if we're going through some genuinely tough times.

For any human being, it's healthy to be able to tell the truth about ourselves. To be sure, we need the right balance and—to some extent—to choose our time and place, but we need to be able to be real.

Confession and renewal. Psalm 32, a *wisdom Psalm*, offers helpful insight in all of this. It's a Psalm about confession and forgiveness. It begins with a couplet of beatitudes to set the tone:

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Then, right away, the words of confession pour out of the psalmist's heart and soul:

While I kept silent, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand (referring to God's hand) was heavy upon me; and my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you (to God), and I did not hide my iniquity; I said I will confess my transgressions, and God forgave my sin.

What makes the Psalm so powerful is that it is *right on* about the human situation—about our lives, our burdens, our stress, our guilt, about all the human stuff we keep inside ... stuff that weights us down.

As human beings, we need to be able to tell the truth about what's in our hearts. Too often in our culture, we see such *truth-telling* as weakness (this is particularly true with us men) and we think if we show we are *needy* in this way, that we are in some way deficient.

How sad.

For all of us, there are things in our mind and spirit—human tendencies and habits—for which we need forgiveness. That doesn't make us *needy*; it makes us human.

The Psalmist knows about the power of sin that lingers unforgiven. He knows because he knows—still more—the power forgiveness holds for new life.