

#5 – On the Testing of a Married Relationship



Dear Peregrina (Tuesday afternoon, 4 PM):

I had lost track of the fact that today is the first year anniversary of a profound irruption of challenging experiences into your married relationship.

The **Oxford English Dictionary** defines “irruption” in this way: “The action of bursting or breaking in; a violent entry, inroad, incursion, or invasion, esp. of a hostile force or tribe. spec. an abrupt local increase in the numbers of a species of animals.” The word first appeared in an English text in 1577. I chuckled to myself about that last part, all of those animals, and about certain breeds that propagate themselves with astonishing ease to the dismay of their owners.

I do not use irruption thoughtlessly, as if I know how you both felt as you suffered its impact. But I have intuited that for both of you it has felt at times

that your previous "normal" has been invaded by hostile forces, and probably permanently wrecked! There is no repairing that normal. Rather it must be about a "normal" that you both have outgrown, and the summons for you both to establish a more perceptive and generous version of normal.

Last year I remember the combination of distress and anger I saw in you, both brightly present ... and both completely understandable, and feelings that I would have expected to be there. They significantly challenged you – even to feel them – and I prayed as I listened to you that you would be safeguarded, you and your man both.

Yet I recognized that for you to have these feelings out in the open was new territory for you. You kept trying to tidy the feelings up as you expressed them to me, or sought to substitute reasoning for feeling, and several times you expressed an apology to me for "being this way." I saw you happening in a way that I had not been able to see before. I felt the significance of this, and knew that I was on holy ground.

And even though I knew what this meant for you to be dropped into such a maelstrom of feelings, I could not help but feel that you were being made more alive, more textured in your personality, and more three-dimensional. And because of this, I intuited that whatever else the irruption meant, it meant that there was an in-breaking of a great possibility for change in how you yourself stand and interact with the world, and in how you and your husband might be helpful to each other.

And so I felt then, and I feel now a year later, that God has been at work in the irruption, such that it is difficult to call this a sorrow of your married life, when in fact it has awakened you, and you both, to new possibilities for your relationship.

But as with the ways of God with us humans, it requires of those in such experiences to let go, and to let the experiences in, to fully feel them (before thinking them and disciplining them and then filing them in their proper

drawer). You must allow your affective depths to be revealed to yourself, and to your mate, that you might learn what is in your depths of soul. The soul's first language is affect, and so we must be trained to let the soul speak fully in this way, before we let our intellect "figure out" what our feelings are expressing.

One of the greatest realities of this past year is that you both entered the great classroom where the deepest structures of your married relationship were brought to light, into the Light by the Light. You are given the chance to decide again whether your relationship has in fact caught up with significant growth you both have undergone over 20 years, or 25 years, or however long it has been that you have been married. It is a great grace to be able to see your relationship – its bones; its basic structures – so that you might decide together now how to rebuild it together.

You used the word "apprehensive" to describe one of the feelings you notice in yourself concerning this anniversary. I know that the Latin root of that word means the act of seizing upon something. The "ap-" is the Latin preposition "ad" meaning an intentional action towards something; the "-prehend" part is the Latin verb "to take or seize." So, the word means that one intentionally goes towards something that she wishes to take, to seize. How interesting, then, that for you, and for most of us I guess, you mean by this word "apprehensive" something quite different than its roots. You mean a passivity, a kind of dread-full waiting for something coming at you!

So what if you laid claim to the actual meaning of that word "apprehensive" today, doing this in honor of a challenging anniversary for your married relationship? What if you resolved today to go towards, for the sake of seizing them, of taking hold of them, the victories that this year of very hard work has given you, and you both, and you both with your children (who got to see a real marriage, really at work)? Use today to apprehend your victories.

All of these words that I write, Peregrina, are simply my way of

acknowledging you both, giving you honor and a nod of genuine respect.
Well done.

With warm regards in Christ in Christ the Pilgrim,

Padre