

Cultural Creation vs. True Civilization Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time Monday,
July 7, 2014 8:15 AM **Hos 2:16, 17c-18, 21-22;** Mt 9:18-26 (Today we have a decline
in all those qualities that make a civilization really civilized, those qualities that should
adhere to people who know the Lord and who express that knowledge in the way they live.)

**“I will espouse you to me forever: I will espouse you in right and in justice; in love
and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord.”**

This is from the scroll of Hosea. **The prophets were social commentators. What they
said was that the culture of Canaan had created something very false**, a false idea of
God, a false idea of right and wrong, a false idea of conscience. Everything was out of kilter.
The name that was given in the local dialect to god, the name “lord” in the local dialect
called Ugaritic is Baal. But this was not an argument about dialects. It was an argument about
ideas. **The idea of divinity conveyed by Baal was very different from the idea conveyed
by Yahweh or Adonai**, ways in which the prophets referred to God. “The Lord” it’s often
translated.

Now Hosea wants to make it clear what the **difference is between the cultural god and
the God revealed to the heart**, a God revealed in the life and experience of Israel: being
chosen, lifted up, saved from bondage, liberated into the Promised Land. **It’s these issues:
right and justice, love and mercy, fidelity and knowledge**—“you shall know the Lord.” So
the Lord is someone who can be known. That’s the essential attribute. **Baal is not
knowable as a person.** In the Book of Kings, there’s the story about Elijah and how he
taunts the priests of Baal by saying, “Well, keep praying. Maybe he is in the privy. Maybe he
is tired. Maybe he is busy. Maybe he went on a journey, and so on. But the text says, “But
there was no one listening.” There was no one listening to the priests of Baal because there is
no such reality. **That’s a cultural creation.** That’s what Hosea is trying to say.

People can create God in their own image and likeness. That's the wrong way around. It's God who creates us in God's image and likeness. **And we are to follow that image and likeness according to the direction of God himself from within us. That's how we know the Lord. We know his direction, his guidance.** Of course in order for us to even hear, we have to be prayerful; **we have to be quiet enough to listen.** We can't allow ourselves to be constantly distracted: listening to music and entertainment and television and filling our minds up even with important business, because then we won't know the Lord.

And then if the entire society doesn't know the Lord, then there's no more right or justice or mercy or love or fidelity. And we see that **today: a decline in all those qualities that make a civilization really civilized,** that give guidance to the civic fabric of society, **that help people cohere and work together and support one another and have some kind of solidarity.** Those are **all qualities that should adhere to people who know the Lord and who express that knowledge in the way they live.**

Now in the gospel, **Jesus lives out all these qualities.** He is the one who embodies them perfectly. And he is calling us to also embody them and spread them as best we can.