

Scripture Study

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C



Opening prayer

Exodus 32:7-11,13-14

(Ps 51:3-4,12-13,17,19)

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Luke 15:1-32

Overview of the Gospel:

- Last week, we saw how the multitudes were gathered around Jesus. This week, we see that in this multitude are “tax collectors and sinners” as well as members of the prominent religious parties, the Pharisees and scribes.
- These last were scandalized that Jesus associates (even sits down to eat with—see also Luke 5:29-32) with those they considered unlearned and unclean. As a result they complain against him (“murmur” in the RSV-CE—as the Israelites did against Moses and God in the wilderness. See Exodus 16:1-3).
- In reply, Jesus tells three parables about the compassion and mercy of God: the Lost Sheep (verses 4-7), the Lost Coin (verses 8-10), and the Prodigal Son (verses 11-32). The key to these parables are the attitudes and reactions of those in heaven (verses 7 and 10), the younger son (verse 18), the father (verses 20, 22-23, 31-32), and the older brother (verses 28-30).

Questions:

- In the First Reading, Moses had everything to gain and nothing to lose if he allowed the Israelites to suffer for their sins (see verse 10). What did he do instead? What should be our response when we see our brother sinning? When he repents?
- In the Second Reading, what type of person was St. Paul before his conversion? To what factors does he attribute this change?
- In the Gospel Reading, how does Jesus’ parable of the sheep relate to the complaining of the Pharisees?
- Who is it, exactly, who rejoices in heaven over a “sinner who repents” (verses 7, 10)?
- What stages does the younger son go through on his pilgrimage (verses 13-16)? What brings him to his senses? What does he realize then? With what sort of attitude does he approach the father? How does the father receive the son? Why?
- How does the older brother feel about his younger brother’s return? Why? How does the father answer the older son’s objections?
- Comparing yourself with the two brothers in this story, who are you most like? Why? Whom would you have identified with 10 years ago or in your youth?
- How have you experienced God as similar to this father? When have you been like the older brother, quietly resentful of God’s lavishness to (apparently) less deserving people? Why?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 545, 1439, 1468

Closing Prayer

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

What have I to fear, then? Surely the God of infinite justice who pardons the prodigal son with such mercy will be just with me “who am always with him”? –St. Therese of Lisieux

"There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents"

Scripture: *Luke 15:1-32*

Meditation: Do you take offense when someone else seems to get a reward or favor they don't deserve? The scribes and Pharisees took great offense at Jesus because he associated with sinners and treated them graciously. The Pharisees had strict regulations about how they were to keep away from sinners, lest they incur defilement. They were shocked with the way in which Jesus freely received sinners and ate with them. Sinners, nonetheless, were *drawn to Jesus to hear him* speak about the mercy of God. Jesus characteristically answered the Pharisees' charge with a parable or lesson drawn from everyday life.

What does Jesus' story about a lost sheep and a lost coin tell us about God and his kingdom? Shepherds normally counted their sheep at the end of the day to make sure all were accounted for. Since sheep by their very nature are very social, an isolated sheep can quickly become bewildered and even neurotic. The shepherd's grief and anxiety is turned to joy when he finds the lost sheep and restores it to the fold. The housewife who lost a coin faced something of an economic disaster, since the value of the coin would be equivalent to her husband's daily wage. What would she say to her husband when he returned home from work? They were poor and would suffer greatly because of the loss. Her grief and anxiety turn to joy when she finds the coin. Both the shepherd and the housewife "search until what they have lost is found". Their persistence pays off. They both instinctively share their joy with the whole community. The poor are particularly good at sharing in one another's sorrows and joys. What was new in Jesus' teaching was the insistence that sinners must be sought out and not merely mourned for. God does not rejoice in the loss of anyone, but desires that all be saved and restored to fellowship with him. That is why the whole community of heaven



rejoices when one sinner is found and restored to fellowship with God. Seekers of the lost are much needed today. Do you persistently pray and seek after those you know who have lost their way to God?

How can you love someone who turns their back on you and still forgive them from the heart? The prophets remind us that God does not abandon us, even if we turn our backs on him (Micah 7:18). He calls us back to himself — over and over and over again. Jesus' story of the father and his two sons (sometimes called the parable of the prodigal son) is the longest parable in the gospels. What is the main point or focus of the story? Is it the contrast between an obedient and a disobedient son or is it between the warm reception given to a spendthrift son by his father and the cold reception given by the eldest son? Jesus contrasts the father's merciful love with the eldest son's somewhat harsh reaction to his errant brother and to the lavish party his joyful father throws for his repentant son. While the errant son had wasted his father's money, his father, nonetheless, maintained unbroken love for his son. The son, while he was away, learned a lot about himself. And he realized that his father had given him love which he had not returned. He had yet to learn about the depth of his father's love for him. His deep humiliation at finding himself obliged to feed on the husks of pigs and his reflection on all he had

lost, led to his repentance and decision to declare himself guilty before his father. While he hoped for reconciliation with his father, he could not have imagined a full restoration of relationship. The father did not need to speak words of forgiveness to his son; his actions spoke more loudly and clearly! The beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet symbolize the new life — pure, worthy, and joyful — of anyone who returns to God.

The prodigal could not return to the garden of innocence, but he was welcomed and reinstated as a son. The errant son's dramatic change from grief and guilt to forgiveness and restoration express in picture-language the resurrection from the dead, a rebirth to new life from spiritual death. The parable also contrasts mercy and its opposite — un-forgiveness. The father, who had been wronged, was forgiving. But the eldest son, who had not been wronged, was unforgiving. His un-forgiveness turns into contempt and pride. And his resentment leads to his isolation and estrangement from the community of forgiven sinners. In this parable Jesus gives a vivid picture of God and what God is like. God is truly kinder than us. He does not lose hope or give up when we stray. He rejoices in finding the lost and in welcoming them home. Do you know the joy of repentance and the restoration of relationship as a son or daughter of your heavenly Father?

"Lord Jesus, may the light of your love and truth free me from the darkness of sin and unbelief. Let your light shine through me that others may see your love and truth and find hope and peace in you. . May I never doubt your love nor take for granted the mercy you have shown to me. Fill me with your transforming love that I may be merciful as you are merciful."

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