

## **24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time: Lost and Being Found By God's Mercy (C-2022)**

Exodus 32:7-11,13-14; Psalm 51:3-4,12-13,17,19; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-32

Dear family and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Church,

Consider the invitation of the Responsorial Psalm this weekend, "I will rise and go to my father" (Ps 51:18). Rising and going are acts of getting out from what enslaves us and seeking help. It is a humbling decision and a loving thing to do when we fall out from grace! It is a courageous decision to rise from what keeps us stuck, like awful feelings towards ourselves and others!

The parable of the Prodigal Son is a compelling story of forgiveness and reconciliation. It is a profound conclusion to the first two parables, the stories of lost sheep and coin, and the narratives of the first two readings, which proclaim respectively that God always seeks out the lost and rejoices upon finding; he spared the Israelites from punishment who succumbed to the sin of idolatry and showed Mercy to Paul who was transformed from blasphemer to apostle to the Gentiles. The parable poignantly sums all this up! It tells us that we have a God who generously blesses us in every way and does not cut off sinners from his grace but provides the opportunity to return home and even runs to meet the sinner on the way home. It is his joy to celebrate when a sinner repents and finally comes home; it is a feast day in heaven! Thus, we heard Jesus saying, "I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Lk 15:7).

Like the Prodigal Son, we are all blessed in every way, but sometimes we may have misused the blessings and are lost that we struggle to find our way, or perhaps in some way, we don't notice it. It may happen when we no longer pray and distance ourselves from the Holy Eucharist for petty reasons. It may happen when earthly pleasure becomes our ultimate joy rather than God. It may happen when we are no longer doing good deeds and acting as if there is nothing wrong. It may happen when we are stuck with habitually telling lies instead of telling the truth; when we are stuck with not forgiving and living in suspicion; when we cease to care for others and live in prejudice. It may happen when we are overcome by anger or jealousy or beaten up by the terrible and depressing problems in life or when we are stuck with awful feelings, and what have you? Interestingly, this experience has a nagging emptiness and sense of incompleteness. It is like a tiny light that flickers amid the darkness that nudges the person to some longing for wholeness, peace, and love; such longing is a working of the Holy Spirit, and it is ultimately a longing for God, like the Prodigal Son who was awakened by the sad circumstance where he was stuck with but led him to long to return home.

Jesus tells us the good news that God never gets tired of waiting and seeking out those who lose their way; even after the most stupid mistakes and darkest sins, he takes us back with open arms to restore us to his love. An honest and humble acceptance of one's mistakes and sins is a powerful response to the God who finds us. It is a disposition that leads us to realize how we are, who we are, and to whom we belong; with this disposition, we find God. St. Paul says this well: "I am grateful to him who has strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord because he considered me trustworthy in appointing me to the ministry. I was once a blasphemer, a persecutor, and arrogant, but I have been mercifully treated"(1 Tim 1:12-13).

Another great lesson in this parable is that we could learn to deal with others. We notice that the prodigal son's father didn't refuse his son's request for the inheritance. He did not force him to remain at home or scold the son about the consequences of his decision. He did not try to change his son's intentions, foolish as they might be, but he let him go. As a result, the son went off and learned his lessons from his own experience. He enjoyed the good life for a moment but suffered from his squandering and later realized how good he had it back home.

We all want what's best for those we love, but are we willing to admit that it is difficult to change people until they are ready and much more to understand and learn to forgive? Yes, we cannot change people overnight or easily forgive. But when they are ready, and when we are also, as the psalm responds: "I will rise and go to my father," changes happen. On the other hand, those who lost their way often have to go through a personal hell to learn the lessons. Often the best we can do is to pray and hope they learn without suffering too much damage. Isn't this the lesson of the prodigal son? Isn't this the way God is with us?

God allows us to make mistakes, and learn the lessons, even the hard way. He patiently waits until we are ready to correct our ways, meets us halfway, and celebrates with joy. We heard the father saying, "we must celebrate and rejoice because my son was dead and has come to life again" (cf. Lk 15:32). We have to rejoice in this Holy Sacrifice of the Mass because God continues to bring us to life again and again. We have to rejoice in every Holy Sacrament we celebrate because God will not leave us forever broken and stuck in miserable conditions. We have to rejoice because His Mercy endures. We have to rejoice because his mercy heals our miseries!

Let nothing prevent you from rising and going to our merciful Father and seek for help! (cf Ps 51:18)

God bless you!

Fr. Manny Hewe  
Pastor