

Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time C2022

Following the long Gospel of today, my homily will be short. Let me start it this way: Twenty one years have passed since September 11, 2001. The event that happened that day is always fresh in the collective memory of the American people. It still raises mixed feelings in many, from sadness for lost lives to anger for what happened, from resentment to hatred for those who caused such a tragedy. Facing such a reality, Jesus shows us the way to deal with negative feelings through the parables of the lost and the found, and that of the prodigal son.

First, let us set the context of the parables: Jesus shows some leniency towards the tax collectors and sinners. He let them approach him, he welcomes them, he even eats meal with them. That is a scandal for the Pharisees and the Scribes. They complain that those are bad guys who do not care for the law, who are faithless and disobedient. How could Jesus mingle with them?

Jesus' response to them is very simple: For sure, they are bad guys and care for nothing spiritual than bodily pleasures, but God loves them. That is the reason why he has come, to find the lost and to bring him where he is missing and where he should be, that is, the house of his Father. Is not that what a shepherd does when he finds his lost sheep? Is not that what a woman does when she finds her lost coin? Is not that what a father does when he finds his lost son?

Such a vision of Jesus changes everything: the situation of loss becomes an occasion of joy because what was lost is found. That is what his Father does; he wants all to come to him and be saved. That is the logic of God's Kingdom, that what was lost may be found, that whoever was lost may find life again.

But, why do Pharisees and Scribes complain about Jesus' attitude? Because they think that a separation should be put between the good and the bad, the sinners and the "holy ones". However, unlike them, Jesus reveals in these parables that God loves all unconditionally, the just and the sinners alike, that each individual is worth being found when he is lost.

Like a shepherd who lost just one sheep, goes looking after it and rejoices when he finds it, so God does when a sinner renounces his sinful situation and comes back to him. Like a woman who lost her coin, lights a lamp to look for it, and rejoices with the neighbors, because she has found it, so does God acts toward us when we abandon our sinful past and want to write a new chapter of our life with Jesus.

Every conversion on earth brings joy in heaven. When we renounce our bad behaviors and turn to God, he is happy that we, his sons and daughters, are able to act so for the glory of his name and our eternal salvation.

In front of such a joy from heaven and the truth that our Father forgives the repentant sinners, the attitude of the oldest son of the Gospel becomes difficult to understand. Why does he not rejoice because his brother who was lost is back? Why does he not just enter the house to celebrate his brother who was dead and is now back to life?

Some of us are like the oldest son, consumed with jealousy and envy for the place the repentant sinners and the new converts take in the community. And yet the fact that we never abandoned our faith should push us to rejoice that others come to know Jesus and give him their lives.

My friends, conversion requires the courage to break with our mortal past. The youngest son was saved, because he dared go back home and get out of the bad situation in which he was. Counting on his father's compassion and mercy, he experienced his bounty. Without our efforts to get rid of sins, and without trusting God's mercy, we cannot experience in our life that peace that comes from a repentant heart.

Let me conclude: Jesus calls us today to the conversion of heart. He wants to reassure us that his Father forgives us because he loves us. Whatever might be our sinfulness, it is never late to straight things out. A second chance is always possible. Hope is Christian; despair is anti-Christian. Do not let God's grace pass your way without seizing it. Do not close your heart to the grace of forgiveness. Reconcile with God and with your fellows, and you will have Christ's peace. God bless you all.

Exodus 32: 7-11, 13-14; 1Timothy 1, 12-17; Luke 15: 1-32



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