

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

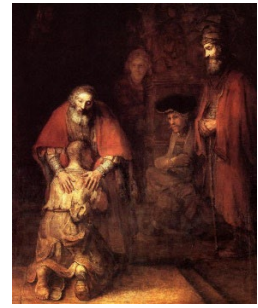
[Reading I: Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14](#)

[Responsorial Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 17, 19](#)

[Reading II: 1 Timothy 1:12-17](#)

[Gospel: Luke 15:1-32](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:
<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/090422.cfm>



Rembrandt, Prodigal Son, 1666

The parables of Jesus are offered in a particular context. Tax collectors and sinners came to listen to Jesus. "Tax collectors and sinners" was code for people outside the law who were unrighteous. "Pharisees and scribes" was code for those inside the law who were thus righteous. In associating with those outside the law, those inside the law viewed Jesus as leaving the right way. However, Jesus saw his actions as working to bring people into the right relationship with God.

Jesus tells three parables in response to the mindset of the Pharisees and the Scribes in the hope that they will see their need for conversion and develop a new self-knowledge. In the first parable, Jesus invites them to see themselves in the parable. "What man among you...." Most anyone will try to find something of value that they have lost. They have probably had this experience in life. They had also rejoiced in some way when they recovered what was lost. God sees those who are sinners not as opponents but as people who have gotten lost. It is God's role to find them, not abandon them.

The second parable is similar. A woman who has lost a coin searches for it and gathers her friends to celebrate when she finds it.

The third parable contrasts God's attitude toward sinners with that of the Pharisees and scribes. The younger son insults the father by wanting the father's money before he dies and then squanders it. As he approaches, he intends to humiliate himself before his father. The father, however, rejoices and welcomes the son back. He then holds a celebration for all in town that the younger son has returned.

The older son reflects the position of the Pharisees and the scribes who think they are better because they have kept the law. They are owed something because of what they have done. In Jesus' understanding, they, too, are lost. The Father goes out to the older son as well to try to bring him into the banquet, but he holds to his position and separates himself from the father.

The key to these parables is the father's love and compassion. God's love is unconditional. God loves us just as we are. We do not earn it, nor can we demand it. It is a free gift if we are willing to accept it. The First Letter of John tells us that "God is Love." God can be no other way than loving. Human hearts place restrictions upon God, but God does not accept any of them. In baptism, God invites us into a covenant, an unconditional agreement. God makes us daughters and sons, people who God will never forget.

The first reading from Exodus seems to betray the comments just made. The author is using a literary technique called anthropomorphism. God, who is infinite, without bounds, is presented in the limits of a human form with all the qualities a human would have.

When the Israelites traveled through the desert, they grew weary and looked back on the familiar things in Egypt, including pagan worship. Forgetting all that God had done for them in freeing them from slavery, they created a golden calf to worship. In terms they could grasp,

God is presented as having great anger and wanting to sulk. As a wisdom figure, Moses reminds God of the promises that God made to the patriarchs. In an omitted verse, Moses twists God's arm by asking what the Egyptians will think when they learn of the destruction of the Israelites. God brought these people out of slavery and then let them die. Who would want to follow your ways if the people cannot trust you? God's true nature is shown as God changes his mind. A parable-like story to show God's faithfulness to the people God has chosen.

The second reading is a personal example of the Gospel message. Paul had been a Pharisee and had persecuted those who did not follow the Pharisaic understanding of how to live for God. Paul not only experienced forgiveness and a new relationship with God but was called by God to be a minister of the Gospel. Paul was grateful and in awe at what God had done. God can do the same for everyone who accepts God's love and allows God to work in their life.

Reflection Questions:

What new perspectives do these parables offer you?

How has being forgiven by someone impacted your life?

What challenges do you face in forgiving someone who offended/injured you?

What challenges do you face in accepting that God totally forgives you and others?

How are you responding to God's gift of love in your life?

Themes

Forgiveness

God's unconditional love

Repentance

Sacrament of Penance

Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that we may recognize the length and depth of God's love for us and reach out to all who have become estranged from God or the Christian community

For an open heart: that we may be open to being found by God and allow God to love us even when we cannot love ourselves

For the grace of repentance: that we may recognize from whom we have wandered and turn towards the Good Shepherd's outstretched arms of forgiveness

For the grace to forgive: that the love of God will free our hearts to forgive all who have injured us