

Commentary on the Readings for September 11, 2022

The 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The theme of the Readings for today all center around God's mercy and forgiveness, but there are other aspects of God's love involved in these readings as well. It would be helpful to read all of them carefully and then come back to see some of the less obvious points.

In the **First Reading** from the *Book of Exodus (32:7-11, 13-14)*, God is angry with His people because they wanted to worship something they could see, touch and feel, not God Himself who gave them life, freedom and direction. God had a right to be angry because He just delivered them from slavery in Egypt; but notice how Moses "talks" God out of the wrath He intended. True, those who were involved in this idolatry were punished, but the others were saved. In all the stories of the Old Testament where people grossly disobey God, He punishes them; but there is always an act of kindness and love following. Examples of this are the Cain and Abel story and the Noah and the Ark story. Punishment is not always a sign of total loss of love and friendship; but rather, as a mother or father punishes a child for disobedience, it can be, and often is, a sign of "tough love."

In the **Responsorial Psalm (51:3-4, 12-13, 17, 19)**, the Psalmist prays for and receives mercy in this, the great "Miserere." It is a beautiful Psalm that we should all be familiar with and use as our own **Act of Contrition**; but remember, a true act of contrition requires a sincere promise to *sin no more*. This Psalm is modeled after King David's remorse when confronted by Nathan, the priest; however, David asked God for forgiveness in spite of his great sin. He became a great leader and servant of God. So we can learn from this that even though our sins are great, God can and will forgive if we are truly sorry and strive to keep from sinning again.

In the **Second Reading** from *St. Paul's First Letter to Timothy (1:12-17)*, Paul gives us an informal statement of beliefs (a "creed"), and herein lies the essence of all the readings. See if you can find it before reading this commentary any further. Paul was as great a sinner as King David; but God forgave him, and look what he accomplished. We all should see ourselves in this light.

The **Gospel Reading** is taken from the *Gospel of Luke (15:1-32)*. In this long Gospel Reading we have three familiar stories: Luke's version of *The Good Shepherd*, *The Lost Coin* and finally *The Prodigal Son* or, as I would prefer to call it, *The Forgiving Father* story. Each of these has its own meaning and purpose, but our theme is best illustrated in the last story of The Prodigal Son. Put yourself in the father's place: both sons were wrong. One showed it by foolish ways of living. The other was outwardly obedient, but resented every minute of it; but did the father get angry at either? He did not bar the younger son from the door, but ran to meet him and welcome him home. He did not rebuke the elder son; rather he gave him reassurance and comfort. This required the divine gift of **patience**, one of the most difficult aspects or components of Love.

Now, putting them all together, I hope that you can see not only God's mercy, but also His *patience* in waiting and watching *until we are ready to open the door of our heart and let God in*. (See **Revelation 3:20**) Now, after reading all of the above, are YOU willing to turn, or return, to the Father and, with a contrite heart say: "**Father, I have sinned**"? Something to think about during your prayer time this week!

MFB