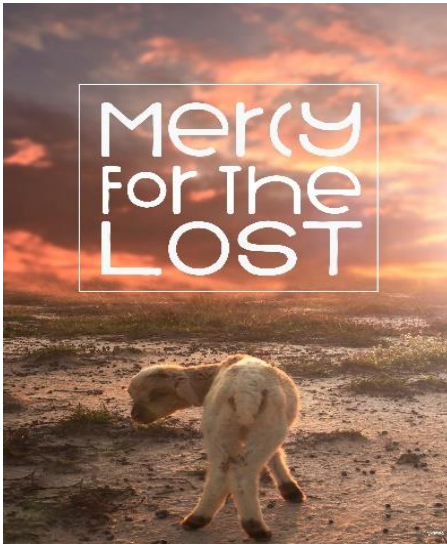


Deacon Steve's Reflections on the Sunday Readings
September 15, 2019 – 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Exodus 32: 7-11, 13-14 Psalm 51: 3-4, 12-13, 17, 19
1 Timothy 1: 12-17 Luke 15: 1-32



As we approach the final week of summer, we have already seen hints of autumn. With each gust of wind or with a steady bit of rain, the lawn is covered with leaves. The trees have a bit of fall color, nothing significant, but just enough for us to see that changes are coming. Students are back in school to the delight of parents everywhere. Summer vacations are becoming a distant memory and thoughts have turned to studies, sports, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and (gasp) Christmas. Advent is just some ten weeks away as we continue in the final days of Ordinary Time – in itself a time of transition and renewal.

The intercessory words of Psalm 51 – *“Thoroughly wash me from by guilt and of my sin cleanse me.”* – remind us of the need for restoration. Today’s readings focus on the themes of repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation and renewal. These are the hallmarks of our Catholic faith. As a people oriented to the living Christ, the Son of God, we are all men and women beset by sin, weakness and limitation. Without God’s infinite mercy, we would have little hope, tainted as we are by original sin; however, God continually reaches out to us in compassion and generosity. In today’s reading from the Gospel of Saint Luke, Jesus declared: *“There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.”*

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus tells us of the young man, who after taking his father’s inheritance and squandering it on a life of dissipation (other translations use more direct and blunt language) is destitute. Coming to his senses, he seeks to return to his father’s house to live not as a son, but as a hired hand. As he approached, his father ran to greet him with unbridled joy. Although he begged only to return to the household as a servant, his father, in loving mercy, welcomed him back and restored the young man to his place as a son in his house. The repentant son received forgiveness and was redeemed. Yet, not all in his father’s house welcomed him back. The elder son, who had remained with his father, seemingly out of a sense of duty or obligation, refused to join in the celebration and complained that, despite his own perceived fidelity to the father, had never received such a welcome and celebration. The father, said to the older son: *“My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.”* Sadly, Jesus never told us if the elder son entered into the house to join the celebration. Did his bitterness separate him from the love of the father? Did he turn away from the one who was lost and now was found? We do not know!

If we are to be saved, we must be like the father, and offer forgiveness to those who wrong us, as Jesus once said, *“not seven times, but seventy times seven times”*. In the Lord’s Prayer, we pray: *“forgive us our trespasses, AS WE FORGIVE those who trespass against us.”* Let us follow the example of Christ and reconcile ourselves with those who have wronged us, so that we might all share in the Father’s love and gain our place in the Heavenly Kingdom. After all, the love of our Heavenly Father is utterly without limits; we who are made in His image and likeness, must do no less. *Now* is the perfect time to start as we journey toward a deeper relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Deacon Steve Szmuto