

24th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – C; Sept. 11th 2022
Exodus 32: 7-11, 13-14; 1 Timothy 1: 12-17; Luke 15: 1-32

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

In the life of Israel God appears to be the embodiment of mercy and forgiveness. In the Old Testament what we see throughout is, on the one side the unconditional forgiveness and mercy of God and on the other side the continuous infidelity of Israel. The first sin of Israel, as we heard in the first reading, was the idolatry. Though God was blazed with anger, finally He forgave them. But Israel continued with her unfaithfulness to God and whenever they repented, God forgave them unconditionally. Through his ministry and teaching Jesus presented the same God of mercy and forgiveness. But his approach and relationship with the public sinners were a little too much for the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees to contain. They accused him of being too close and lenient towards sinners. So through the three beautiful parables in Luke Jesus wanted to give them the true attitude of his heavenly Father towards the repentant sinners. **There is no chapter in the New Testament so well-known and dearly loved as the 15th chapter of Luke's gospel. It has been called, 'the gospel' in the gospel.** Jesus' presentation of God as the forgiving Father even surpassed the Jewish idea of God's mercy.

When we listen to this parable, we may think that the son made a bad choice. That is our modern way of looking at the sins. But in the context of this parable he did worse than making a bad choice. For he sold his inheritance of property he received from his father and left his father's home. **This is what all sinners do when they commit sins. They too sell the inheritance of grace and eternal life given to them by God and go away from Him.** In the parable, as the son squandered away the inheritance he lost his title as son. He too knew it and when he came to his senses, he rose and went back to his father. He never expected back his position in the family as son rather he wanted to be considered as a daily wage or hired servant.

On the other hand the parable gives the depth of the sadness and anxieties of the father who lost his son. It is said, **"While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion."** That means, the father was waiting in front of his house daily looking far out to the street to see his son return. **It is said that he was filled with compassion not anger or indignation.** And also Luke gives us in details of the excitement of the father who saw his son again. He neither gave any ear to the apology of the son nor asked any questions as why he wandered away and squandered the inheritance. **The father**

knew right away that the very return of his son is the sign of his repentance.

The father wanted to make this an occasion of celebration with the rest of his family. By putting a ring on the son's finger, the father once again recognized him as his son. As we appreciate the love and compassion of the father we may sympathize with the older son who never failed to obey his father and never left the house. But in reality both sons are alienated from the father. If the younger son literally left the home, the older son, though living at home, is away from his father mentally. For, he could not appreciate the love and compassion of his father towards his younger brother. He wanted real justice to be done and not forgiveness be given.

In every community we find the younger sons and older sons. The younger sons are the people who go away from God and religion and some of them come into the senses and come back, while others continue in the state of sins. After going away far from God many feel that God will never accept them back and thus simply give up the hope or effort to make a comeback. **Please remember there is no sin in the world which God cannot forgive; there is nobody whom God will reject when he/she comes back with a repentant heart.** What we need is the humility of the prodigal son who could confess, **“Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.”**

Sometimes the older sons in the community get prejudiced against the return of the younger sons, because, they don't appreciate such a last moment conversion. God does not count on how many years or how far we are gone away from Him; rather He looks forward to see when our return will be. He then celebrates that moment of our return with his angels, the way the father of the prodigal son did. In Ezekiel 33:1 God says to the Prophet, **“As I live, says the Lord, I swear, I take no pleasure in the death of a wicked man, but rather in the wicked man's conversion, that he may live.”** Only those who can forgive others and forgive themselves can appreciate and enjoy the forgiveness of the heavenly Father.