

24th Sunday in Ordinary time, Cycle C

1st Reading: Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14

Intro: This is a well-known incident from the exodus story when Moses went up the mountain to talk to God. He stayed on the mountain for 40 days, the people got impatient and asked Aaron to make a golden calf to worship. Our reading picks up there.

2nd Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Intro: This is close to the beginning of Paul's letter to Timothy whom he had put in charge of the whole Ephesian community. Its purpose is to teach Timothy concerning some of the challenges with which he is dealing. It talks about the threat of the Gnostic heresy and church discipline. In the section we have today, Paul is thanking the Lord for the trust he put in him, presumably as an encouragement for Timothy that the Lord will also help him.

Gospel: Luke 15:1-32

While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. Lk 15:20b

In today's Gospel selection, we first have the story of the shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep in the desert and goes off to search for one who has gone astray. That's crazy! While he's gone looking for that one sheep, more might go astray. The shepherds of Jesus' time would never have done that. They knew it was crazy.

Then we have the story of a woman who lost one of ten coins and cleaned her whole house in search of it till she found it. That's not crazy. But she goes on to invite all her neighbors over to celebrate with her in what must have cost her more than the coin she found was worth. That's crazy! Is Jesus telling us that we have a God who is crazy?

Then we have the story we call "The Prodigal Son". The younger son asks his father for his inheritance early and his father gives it to him. That's crazy. Would any of you do that? Maybe you would, but in the ancient world, people wouldn't do that. That son was supposed to stay and help the family secure its financial position.¹ He wasn't supposed to go off and build a life for himself. To the ancient Jewish people, that was crazy.

Then, instead of building a life for himself, he goes off and squanders his inheritance on a life of dissipation. I like that word... smoke dissipates, smells dissipate but money is not supposed to, unless of course you are squandering it.

Then he gets a job. He's tending swine. Remember, the Jewish people consider pork unclean. He is making his living doing unclean work and not making a very good living at that. He is "longing" to eat his fill doing this work. But those who are really making money off raising swine don't care about him. That is not just something that happened in the ancient world. It happens in our modern-day world too.

So he goes back home and his father sees him from afar off. Now how does that happen... that someone sees a lone figure coming from afar off? It only happens if the person is on some vantage point and is looking hard... like sailors do when they climb up into the crow's nest with a telescope to look for

signs of land. Now that's crazy... to spend all day, every day, on some vantage point looking for someone who "kissed the family goodbye" so to speak.

But that is our God... he's crazy about us and wants us back... no matter what the cost... even if it cost him his only son.

This Gospel today invites us to ask ourselves how we are dissipating our inheritance. In what aspect of our lives are we desiring to eat the food of the swine? How can we open ourselves to the fullness of life which living in the family of God promises? How can we open ourselves to His crazy love?

If not that, maybe the Gospel is asking us, like the "good" son, how our self-righteous attitude is holding us back from entering the banquet?

Reflection:

“But his father ordered his servants, ‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’ Then the celebration began.” Lk 15:22-24

Question:

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Reflect upon/Share about a time when you chose the promise of immediate gratification over putting in the time necessary to achieve the best. How long did the happiness from that immediate gratification last? What do you think you need to do in order to receive lasting happiness? What will that look like? Where is God in all that?

Verse by Verse:

Lk 15:1 *Tax collectors and sinners...* | The tax collectors referred to are those who collected taxes for the Roman government. The Jewish people didn't like being under the control of Rome, and tax collectors, aside from sometimes extorting the people, were considered collaborators. Luke points out the displeasure of the scribes and pharisees over Jesus' attitude toward them. See Lk 5:20 and Lk 7:34.

Lk 15:8 *Or what woman...* | Luke, when he tells a story involving a male, will oftentimes follow with a story involving a female.

Lk 15:11b *Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me...* | The eldest son, who would carry on the family work, got double the share of the other sons. The younger sons, though, were expected to use their share in support of the family work, under their older brother.

A father could place the older son in charge before his death (see 1 Kings 1:32-35) but Sir 33:19-23 warns against splitting up the assets early.

Lk 15:31 *...My son...* | The Greek word *teknon*, used here, literally means “my child” and contains all the affection implied by that phrase in English.

ⁱ The image of family, used in this Gospel, is not the image of a modern family wherein the parents work to get the kids good educations so they can get good jobs and leave home and... well, you know the rest. This is the ancient image of family wherein the family was important for the survival of the tribe. Remember, the Hebrews was composed of twelve tribes. When they inhabited the hill country, they lived by tribal society rules. In Jesus' time, many of those rules were still operative.

The rule was: the family had to do its job, whether it was farming or shepherding or whatever. The oldest son was being groomed to take over the family business, so to speak. The other sons were to help in the family business. The daughters were to help in the family business of whichever family they married into. If the families did their jobs, the tribe had a good chance of surviving and growing.