

Homily. 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year C. 14/15 September 2019.

Despite all that God had done to liberate the people from their exile and slavery in Egypt, they quickly went back to their old ways. It was only Moses intercession on their behalf that saved them from destruction. Having listened to Moses, God opted for the medicine of mercy.

St. Paul told us about his life, about how he was a persecutor of Christians and a staunch opponent of their claims about Jesus Christ. He recalled that upon encountering the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus his entire direction in life was converted. In the section we listened to from his Letter to Timothy, Paul says that in the midst of his ignorance and stubbornness he experienced God's mercy, saving him from himself.

Both of these readings flow into the gospel which told us of things lost and found; a sheep lost to its flock and shepherd through its ignorance and a small coin lost to the woman through her negligence. The shepherd searched throughout the countryside for the sheep until it was found, as the woman, likewise, looked everywhere until her coin was recovered.

As with all the parables, there's always a twist in its tail. We need to remember that Jesus was speaking to the powerful Pharisees and educated Scribes of his time because they were fault finding, complaining about Him. They had issues with Him over the way He spent time with the Law-breaking sinners and the tax collectors who worked for Rome while robbing their own people. They thought that He was weakening their

culture and identity, supporting the very people who brought down the reputation of the Jews, a cause they were dedicated to defending.

Jesus knew that they would know that a dedicated shepherd would never leave 99 safe sheep unguarded and at risk in order to find the silly, ignorant lost one. He knew that they would understand how silly and extravagant it was for a woman to tear her house apart for a lost drachma worth just a few cents. He knew that they would know these things because He understood that they, the Pharisees and Scribes, would never do such things. Yet, and here's the twist, Jesus doing exactly that because He knew something that they didn't grasp; that this is what God does for us every time.

We easily and often get lost, confused about our values, beliefs and direction in life for the same headstrong reasons that the people of the Exodus did. We wander off to pastures unknown and unguarded, falling down cracks and into crevices like the sheep and the drachma because, as St. Paul says of himself, we act out of willful pride and ignorance.

In the thinking of the powerful people we've let ourselves become lost, deserving of the punishment and misfortune that befalls us, for to them only the righteous can be saved. In God's thinking, however, and in the mind and heart of Jesus, a new logic is at work, the logic of amazing grace and prodigal, extravagant mercy. God calls and searches until we've been found. God turns the whole place inside out until the drachma, that small coin that is us, is safely back in the purse, throwing parties for one and all at our salvation.

None of this makes much sense as the world sees things, but unless we grasp this merciful hand, we'll never understand God and all that God is doing for us in Christ; nor will we ever get to enjoy the gratitude and grace of the Good News that saves us. Just look around you at how lost we've become, how headstrong, ignorant and proud we are, seeing the consequences of what we've done to ourselves, to others and to our world. Remember the old hymn and take the hand of that amazing grace that finds us letting us see beyond our blindness. Then, joyfully with God, we can be like a good shepherd or a relentless woman, mercifully seeking out any who are lost and rejoicing with God over all who are found safe and sound.