

Homily of Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C, 2022

Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14; Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 17, 19; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-32

The first reading tells the story of the apostasy of the Chosen people of God. It was not long God brought them out of Egypt when they committed the grave sin of apostasy against him. Moses had gone to Mount Sinai for forty days to receive the Ten Commandments and liturgical instructions from God. "When the people saw that Moses was delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, 'Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for that man Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him'" (Exodus 32:1). Following the clamoring of the people Aaron made a golden calf for them with the golden earrings of their wives, sons, and daughters. The people worshipped the golden calf and proclaimed, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." God in his anger wanted to wipe out the people. But he forgave them when Moses interceded for them.

See how the Israelites disparaged Moses who led them out of slavery: "... as for that man Moses..." Are many people not like the Israelites? They sing "Hosanna, hosanna" when there is something to benefit or when things are going well. And they sing "Crucify him, crucify him" when there is nothing to benefit or when things are not going well.

Also, do we become impatient in times of adversity, lose faith, and make "golden calf," as a quick and an easy way out? Or like Aaron, do we fail to stand firm when we are pressured to follow the wrong path?

Despite his disappointment towards his people, Moses did not give up on them. He interceded for them and obtained God's forgiveness for them. Moses teaches us to remain consistent in the path of goodness in good times and in bad times.

In the second reading, St. Paul recalls that he was once a blasphemer, a persecutor, and arrogant. We read in the Acts of the Apostles how "Saul, still breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, that, if he should find any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them back to Jerusalem in chains" (Acts 9:1-2). Despite being a persecutor and a murderer of Christians, the Lord forgave him and made him a chosen instrument of evangelization (Acts 9:15). If Saul, a persecutor and a murderer became a chosen instrument, it means that there is hope for us sinners when we repent.

In the Gospel, the prodigal son took off and "squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation." When he came to his senses and returned home to his father, the father forgave him and restored him to his princely position. Again, this shows that there is hope for us sinners when we repent.

The three instances above show us how generous God is in forgiving us. The instances show that there is no sin beyond God's forgiveness. He sent his son Jesus Christ to die on the Cross to save us. We are the lost sheep and the lost coin found by Jesus. The readings are a message of encouragement to us that God does not hold our past sins against us when we truly repent of the sins. The major problem is some people's inability to forgive themselves, leave their ugly past behind and move forward. This is where the parable of the prodigal son is very relevant. He messed himself up. He came to his senses. He forgave himself. The power of forgiving himself gave him the courage to step out of the mess and go home. If he had remained in the guilt of what he did to himself and stayed on in the pig's farm, he would have ruined his life. Since he had the courage to step out, his father restored his princely status. Therefore, let no one allow his or her ugly past hold him or her hostage. Come to your senses! Free yourself!

Ezekiel 18:31-32, "Cast away from you all the crimes you have committed, and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, house of Israel? For I find no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies—oracle of the Lord God. Turn back and live!"

Isaiah 43: 18-19, "Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? In the wilderness I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers."

We are invited to step out of our sins, wounds, hurts, guilt, shame, bitterness, anger, burden, worries, and anxieties; and place them upon Jesus who takes care of us (1 Peter 5:7). For by his wounds we have been healed (1 Peter 2:24). Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP