

Homily of Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

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 God forgave them when Moses interceded for them.

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. Not only that Saul was forgiven, the Lord made him a chosen instrument to carry his name before Gentiles, kings and Israelites (Acts 9:15). If Saul, a persecutor and a murderer became a chosen instrument, it means that there is hope for everyone.

In the Gospel, the prodigal son took off and "squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation." When he came to his senses and return home to his father, the father forgave and restored his prince-ship in the palace.

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 the past behind and move forward. This is where the parable of the prodigal son is very relevant. He messed himself up. He realized it. 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, his life would have been ruined. Since he had the courage to step out, his father restored his prince-ship.

Sometimes, some people presume wrongly that they are damned due to their ugly past. The following Scripture passages can help in our prayerful reflection:

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!"

Psalms 103: 11-12, "For as the heavens tower over the earth, so his mercy towers over those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him."

Mark 2: 17, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

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). Rivers of living water will flow from within anyone who believes in him (John 7:38).

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