

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Luke 15:1-10

Finally a more digestible Gospel passage!

After these past weeks whose Gospel passages

we have had to navigate with bewilderment and trepidation...

After:

- the fellow who asks for help with inheritance issues and get slammed by Jesus
- the poor fellow who arrives at the banquet improperly dressed and gets a beating
- fire and division
- the narrow door through which no one can seemingly squeeze
- the dinner party with all the social outcasts
- the hatred of loved ones

Jesus' sweet roll seems to come to an end,

and we can approach the table of His word more easily.

We have two parables.

There are actually three parables for the longer version of today's Gospel.

But I thought, since most of us are true products of 2007, and suffer from ADD,
that I would keep it shorter and sweeter.

Moreover, these two parables are dense and intense.

These two parables *are* more approachable and more digestible
because they are about mercy, and mercy is always sweet.

The two parables can very much be considered in parallel

(although each has its proper richness):

two stories about intense searching and finding.

1. a shepherd who loses one of one-hundred sheep, goes in search of it, and finds it.
2. a woman who loses one of ten coins, goes in search of it, and finds it.

They are touching stories, but, frankly, there is a lot of *excess* here.

I am not sure it is terribly prudent, i.e. terribly worthwhile,
to risk ninety-nine sheep for the sake of one sheep.

The celebration also – in both cases – seems somewhat excessive.

I mean, come on:

invite the whole neighborhood for a barbecue for the finding of a single lost coin?

Remember that these are parables, and disproportion is allowed.

Remember also that Jesus is speaking to Pharisees and Scribes who are complaining:

Jesus is welcoming and eating with social misfits, with “sinners”, as they are called here!

In response, there is a certain sacred anger in Jesus,

who has come to reveal the truest nature of God.

Jesus comes to reveal, to *share*, the depths of God.

Jesus speaks in excessive terms because love, by nature, is excessive.
Leaving ninety-nine sheep for the sake of one *is* excessive.
A big bash for such a simple find *is* excessive.
That is because *divine love is excessive*.
God, who is love, is “excessive”.
And God, at all costs, excessively seeks and finds us.
The gaze is so *personal*, it is *as though* everything else disappears for God
The gaze is particularly personal when we fail, when we fall.
And because He is focused on us so personally, when we are found,
“there is more joy in heaven” than anything!

How exactly can this be?
I thought God, at best, magnanimously tolerates me when I blunder and takes me back,
but is often on the verge of saying, “This is the last time.”
Such unfortunate instances are certainly not an occasion for partying.
Apparently they are! **JOY!!!!**
What actually occurs, in a sense:
when I repent, I allow God to radiate in me there where previously He had not,
He who is love; and joy always follows the radiance of love.
Just think about it: I bring joy to God when I acknowledge and offer my failings.
I cannot do that with anyone else. “Uh, *no* thank you.”

And so we amazingly bring God joy when we repent,
the very thought of which humbles us.
But how can Jesus say that “there will be *more* joy over one repentant sinner
than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance”?
Talk about disproportion!
Talk about *difficult to understand*.
Most of us would agree that

- one repentant sinner
- one person who opens whatever has closed in his/her heart to divine love is a tremendous thing, but it does not surpass ninety-nine good boys and girls.

Well, this is not a quantitative thing.
The point is that God wants – more intensely than we can imagine or understand –

- to meet us in our sin
- to meet us there where we have not loved
so to heal us that we might love.

And when we turn to God in any misery
(although Jesus speaks here of the worst misery, the misery of an unloving heart),
not only does God rejoice, the *heavenly hosts* rejoice,
i.e. all the angels and saints and our deceased loved ones,
they are all dancing and “high-fiving” each other.

I am serious!

You want to make your deceased mother or grandfather or friend
proud, and intensify their joy?

Ask God forgiveness for any wrongdoings or misdeeds.

That will make them more proud and more joyous than any great accomplishments.

If this is true, by the way, then when you receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation,
i.e. mega-forgiveness, the heavenly hosts, *your deceased loved ones*,
are on the verge of popping!

In the book of Zephaniah, we read,

“The Lord, your God, is in your midst.

He will rejoice over you in his love.

He will sing joyfully because of you, as one sings at festivals.” (3:17-18)

Let us let ourselves be found.

Be not afraid.

Turn to God, to Jesus, right where you are, in whatever misery.

He does not come to judge or punish

(we punish ourselves by not letting ourselves be found).

He comes as the Good Physician, to heal.

Let us let ourselves be found...