

24<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, C  
TO FORGIVE IS TO RESTORE

*“I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against You; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants.”*

**God is Compassionate:** On this 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, we encounter a God who is compassionate and merciful to His people. The Church invites us to reflect on these attributes of God and imbibe them into our lives and relationship with one another. Forgiveness is one of the hardest gifts to offer, yet it gives us the greatest joy and fulfilment when we offer it with loving generosity. Sometimes, it takes the intervention of someone else before we come to terms with forgiving, like in the First Reading (Ex. 32: 7-11, 13-14), where Moses intervened on behalf of the people of Israel, who lost their patience with Moses and made an image of a calf to worship as their god. This angered God, who threatened to destroy them from the face of the earth. Moses pleaded with God reminding Him of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God relented and forgave their sins. For our God is slow to anger abounding in love and mercy (Ps. 103: 8). Here Moses affirms the reason we sometimes need someone to stand in the gap for us. The Gospel (Lk. 15: 1-32) presents three insightful parables, the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Parable of the Lost Coin, and the popular Prodigal Son's story. Each of these tell the wonderful story of God's generous mercy on us His children from different but similar perspectives.

**Fallen Humanity:** In these parables, we, humanity, is represented by the lost sheep and the lost coin. God created us in love, and desired that we live in loving relationship with Him through obedience, but man disobeyed, severed that relationship, and got lost in sin. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, man has continuously demonstrated his prodigal nature by wasteful rebellion against God's plans. To each of us, God has given us a share of Himself, including the gift of His Son. Like the prodigal son, we have not abused these gifts, misappropriated them, and misdirected them for other selfish purposes. These have parted us from God, kept us distant from God.

**God's Patience:** These parables have shown God's patience with us. The woman who lost her coin, the shepherd with the lost one sheep out of hundred and the father of the prodigal son, who represent God in these stories diligently and

patiently set out in search of what was lost – the woman lit the lamp, swept the floor, and searched until she found her lost coin; the shepherd risked the ninety-nine sheep and went out for the one that was lost until he found it. The father of the prodigal son patiently waited, watching out daily for the return of his son. And when they found the coin and the sheep, as at when the son returned, there was rejoicing. God is never tired of waiting for us. Here is God who goes out looking for His lost children. This is what He did when He sent His Son. As St Paul tells us in the Second Reading (1 Timothy 1:12-17).

***Man's Value to God:*** These parables reiterate the unmerited value God has for each of us. From the very act of creation and the beginning of human history, God has always acted in favour of man. He had no need for us, yet He created us in His image, with intellect and freewill, so that we can enjoy His generosity and love. And even after we had sinned, He did not abandon us in the dungeon of darkness. He sent His Son, who is the light of the wonderful to release us from the kingdom of darkness into His own wonderful light. And although we constantly reneged on our part, God remains always faithful (2 Tim. 3: 13). The Psalmist cries out in praise and envy: "What is man that you keep him in mind, mortal man that you care for him. You have made him little less than a God, with glory and honour you crown him" (Ps. 8). From these parables, we can say unequivocally: "We are the apples of God's eyes" (Ps. 17: 8).

***God's Justice is Merciful and Restorative:*** Implied in the lost coin story but this is obvious in the parable of the lost sheep and in the prodigal son's story that true justice is merciful and restorative. The shepherd was not angry with the sheep that strayed. The father was not angry with the son who absconded. When he returned, he asked not a single question. He simply welcomed him back and restored him to his original position of sonship. By these miracles, we are invited to see ourselves, not only as the lost, the lost sheep and the prodigal son, but also as the woman, the shepherd, and the father of the prodigal son. We are called by God to go in search of lost brothers and sisters and to forgive those who have wronged us.

***My dear friends,*** we have encountered our God in His true nature, as Pope Francis captures it in the title of his book: The Name of God is Mercy. God relates with us in such a personal way that our unworthiness is swallowed up in His worthiness, mercy, and love. God's mercy is very encouraging to the weak and the sinful. It is the foundation for repentance, for if God would not forgive, there would have been no need to repent. But He does, so let us rise to His calling and

turn towards Him so that His mercy can locate us. In the words of Pope Francis, let remember: “God never tires of forgiving us, we are the ones who are tired of asking for His forgiveness.”