

24th Sunday (C)

11th September 2016

‘Bless me, Father, for I have sinned’

Ex 32: the Lord relents from His wrath after golden calf. Ps 50: *Miserere mei Deus*

1Tim 1: *Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners*

Lk 15: *‘this man ... welcome sinners and eats with them.’*

That long chapter of St Luke that we have listened to — chapter 15 — is a very special text in the New Testament, and especially so in this Holy Year of Mercy. I read the long version; I think it’s important to do that, to get the whole sweep of Jesus’s three parables, each one building on the others, working up into a crescendo of mercy. The parables about the lost sheep and the lost drachma are short ... perhaps they could be dismissed as ‘short and sweet’ ... But the longer, dramatic parable of the ‘Prodigal Son’ cannot be passed over, and its powerful message of the Father’s forgiveness should be a central reflection of every Christian life. We heard this parable, too, on the middle Sunday of Lent this year — a crucial point in the penitential season — but hearing it again this Sunday is no bad thing: a wonderful reminder of God’s mercy in this Year of Mercy.

The central theme of the parable, of course, is that we are always welcomed home by God the Father. No matter

what faults we may have committed, if we turn again to the Father in contrition then He is there, waiting for us, immediately welcoming us back with joy. As the refrain of the chapter, we keep hearing, “There is rejoicing amongst the angels of God over one repentant sinner.” Our Lord doesn’t mean this tongue-in-cheek, or as a throw-away phrase. He means this in truth. God our Creator desires nothing other than our goodness, and our being filled with grace. Like any loving Father, it pains Him to see us stray. But His mercy is so great that the moment we show ourselves contrite and ready to turn again to Him, He does all the running — He comes to meet us and embraces us with forgiveness.

Let’s not lose sight of this, as we continue to keep this Holy Year of Mercy. Let’s remind ourselves also of the constant call of Jesus to confess and be forgiven our sins. This Holy Year is an opportunity to embrace mercy — receiving merciful forgiveness from God, and engaging in the merciful treatment of one another. Confession of our sins — Reconciliation with God — Penance and Absolution

... however we phrase the great Sacrament of Mercy ... it has to be a key part of our Christian lives. The more often we embrace the saving grace of Confession, the more we can be sure of living a Christian life. We should certainly make sure that, if it has been many months since our last Confession, we take the chance soon to receive the loving forgiveness of God in that way that He guarantees in the Sacrament. The Prodigal Son knew that there was nowhere else to go, to be assured of love and mercy than the Father's house: he knew he had to confess his sins and hear the Father's voice. This we live out by doing the very same in the Sacrament: putting into words our failings, and hearing the actual words of forgiveness from God: "I absolve you from your sins ..." We need to hear those words, and we need to hear them regularly, if we are to have a healthy spiritual life. We don't want to be carrying round that burden of accumulated sin all the time; and the Lord doesn't mean us to!

St Paul, in the second reading of today's Mass reinforces this theme of God's incredible mercy, which

exceeds all our human expectations. He reminds us just what is the power of God to convert hearts, because he received an outpouring of mercy in his own life.

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, and who judged me faithful enough to call me into his service even though I used to be a blasphemer and did all I could to injure and discredit the faith. Mercy, however, was shown me, because until I became a believer I had been acting in ignorance; and the grace of our Lord filled me with faith and with the love that is in Christ Jesus ... and if mercy has been shown to me, it is because Jesus Christ meant to make me the greatest evidence of his inexhaustible patience for all the other people. (1Tim1:12–16).

Yes, as St Paul says, the Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, rich in graciousness, and ready to relent. He is patient with our faults — not wanting us to falter in our sins, but ready and waiting to pluck us out of the sad consequences of our human frailty. We need to let Him! We need to let God be God to us — for He knows better than we do what is right for us; He has that almighty vision of what will make us happy in the end. *Thank you, Lord, for Your divine mercy. May the tide of Your precious blood, poured out for sinful man, cleanse us from our sins.*