

Loving Mercy!



I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (Ex 32:7-11, 13-14)

God to Moses

⁷Then the LORD said to Moses: Go down at once because your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted corruptly. ^{8d}They have quickly turned aside from the way I commanded them, making for themselves a molten calf and bowing down to it, sacrificing to it and crying out, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!” ⁹I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are, ^e continued the LORD to Moses. ¹⁰Let me alone, then, that my anger may burn against them to consume them. Then I will make of you a great nation.

Moses to God

^{11*} But Moses implored the LORD, his God, saying, ^f “Why, O LORD, should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a strong hand? ¹³Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and how you swore to them by your own self, saying, ^g ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky; and all this land that I promised, I will give your descendants as their perpetual heritage.’”

God to his people

¹⁴So the LORD **changed his mind** about the punishment he had threatened to inflict on his people.

THE FOCUS: God’s mercy and forgiveness

COMMENTARY

- Vv.7-10 talk about the anger of God to his people because of their sins.
- They have become depraved (v.7).
- They made molten calf, worshipping it, sacrificing...(v.8).
- They are stiff-necked (v.9).
- In v.10, God wants to punish them by eliminating them.
- In vv.11-13, Moses is quick to intercede for the people who are about to be punished.
- In v.14, God changes his mind after the prayer of Moses. He does not punish them.

REFLECTIONS

Right after the giving of the commandments, the people of Israel sin against the Lord. They break his commandment.

They make a molten calf. The Lord had just said, “Thou shall not have other gods besides me. Thou shall not make graven images...” (idolatry).

This violation enkindles the ire of God. God sees the people as depraved and stiff-necked / hard headed. Therefore he must punish them.

Punishment is the result of their sin. The punishment is severe, elimination of the whole nation.

God promises to make another one, a better breed with a better attitude towards God. It will come out of Moses. Moses objects to it and intercedes.

His intercession is powerful. He intelligently convinces God not to pursue his plan.

God listens to Moses. He changes his mind. (God acts like a human being = anthropomorphism). He shows his mercy.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 51:3-4, 12-13, 17, 19)

I WILL RISE AND GO TO MY FATHER.

SECOND READING (1 Tim 1:12-17)

Paul's gratefulness to Christ

^{12*}I am grateful to him who has strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he considered me trustworthy in appointing me to the ministry.

Paul's former sins

^{13^k}I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and an arrogant man,

Paul's experience of Christ's mercy

but I have been **mercifully** treated because I acted out of ignorance in my unbelief. ^{14^j}Indeed, the grace of our Lord has been abundant, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

^{15^m}This saying is trustworthy* and deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am the foremost.

¹⁶But for that reason I was **mercifully** treated, so that in me, as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in him for everlasting life.

Paul's doxology

^{17ⁿ}To the king of ages,* incorruptible, invisible, the only God, honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE FOCUS: God's mercy, as felt by St. Paul

COMMENTARY

• The first letter to Timothy is not written by Paul, according to scholars. It must have been written by a follower of Paul that used his name to give credence to it.

• This follower wrote much later after the death of Paul, because it is addressing to new situations not known by Paul himself. The letter is classified as a Pastoral Letter (The others are 2 Timothy and Titus).

• The main point of the reading is Christ's mercy to Paul (to the author).

• V. 12 says Paul is happy that Christ strengthens him. The reason: God considers Paul worthy to be His minister.

• V.13 recalls Paul's unworthiness. His big sins were blasphemy, persecution, and arrogance. All these are sins against faith and charity. These sins disqualify him from being a minister, leader or missionary.

• Paul is very much aware of his past sins.

• V.13b explains that he has been given mercy.

• The reason or excuse: ignorance, naivete.

• V.14 affirms Christ's abundance of grace, faith and love.

• In v.15, Paul firmly affirms the purpose of Christ's coming: to save.

• Paul declares another reason for his gratefulness: he is first to be saved.

• In v.16, Paul interprets the mind or purpose of God: so that he will be used by Christ to display his patience to believers, to be saved like him.

• V.17 glorifies God as king of the ages, etc. as a fitting conclusion of his gratefulness.

REFLECTIONS

Paul is happy and grateful for the Lord's mercy upon him.

In spite of his grievous sins in the past, God has allowed him to be his missionary and minister.

His calling is gratuitous.

Without saying it, he feels he is forgiven and is given recognition for his giftedness as a human person (and a former Pharisee). Truly God is merciful.

He forgives all our sins. He wants to save us and make use of us, so that others too, may be saved.

By showing us his mercy and forgiveness, he is making us his instruments of salvation.

If this is the case, we and all sinners, no matter how bad we have been, have hope.

Believing that we have been forgiven, we now begin our mission.

GOSPEL READING (Lk 15:1-32 or 15:1-10)

¹* “The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to him, ^{2b}but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³So to them he addressed this parable. ^{4c}“What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one^d until he finds it?^e ⁵And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy ⁶and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance. ^{8c}“Or what woman having ten coins* and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it? ⁹And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.’ ¹⁰In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” ¹¹Then he said, “A man had two sons, ¹²and the younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’ So the father divided the property between them. ^{13g}After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. ¹⁴When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. ¹⁵So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. ¹⁶And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. ¹⁷Coming to his senses he thought, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying

from hunger. ¹⁸I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.’” ²⁰So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. ²¹His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ ²²But his father ordered his servants, ‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, ²⁴because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’ Then the celebration began. ²⁵Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. ²⁷The servant said to him, ‘Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹He said to his father in reply, ‘Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. ³⁰But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’ ³¹He said to him, ‘My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. ³²But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; **he was lost and has been found.**”

THE FOCUS: Overflowing Joy

COMMENTARY

- Outline of the Gospel Reading:
-Introduction: Setting (Lk 15:1-3)

-First Parable: The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Lk 15:4-7)

-Second Parable: The Parable of the Lost Coin (Lk 15:8-10)

-Third Parable: The Parable of the Lost Son (Lk 15:11-32)

• Common Characteristics of the Three Parables:

-They are all addressed to the scribes and Pharisees who question / object his association with sinners.

-The sinners are symbolized by the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son.

-All sinners are important to Jesus. He wants to recover them all. He leaves everything to find them.

-He has the historical patience to find and to wait.

-He is sure he is going to find one. He misses no one.

-There is so much joy when he finds them.

-He spends so much to celebrate. God is extravagant in expressing his joy.

-No one can stop him or spoil his celebrations. God is a determined God when it comes to finding sinners and celebrating.

• Yet, the last parable indicates that God misses someone, the one who refuses to recognize God's purpose. God cannot find someone who does not allow oneself to be found.

• God cannot work with the self righteous who think they are correct, and God is wrong.

• The older child is the symbol of the scribes and Pharisees who refuse to associate with Jesus.

• They, too, are sinners in the eyes of God, but they do not see it that way because they are self righteous.

• So, they cannot accept God's invitation to join him. The self righteous people are the hardest people to change. They cannot change. They are hopeless.

• They do not need Jesus to save them.

• Are we righteous or self righteous?

REFLECTIONS

In the three parables, God shows his magnanimity or mercy towards sinners, not just sinners, but notorious public sinners who are not supposed to be associated with a spiritual leader.

He takes pain in finding his lost people.

God celebrates extravagantly even when only one sinner goes back to him. Jackpot!

If this is our God, how can we resist not going back to Him?

Come on, brothers and sisters, let us not be self righteous. Let us admit our sinfulness and God's mercy, by living according to the teachings of Jesus.

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR HOMILY/SHARING

The First Reading speaks of God's mercy on the people of Israel.

The Second Reading speaks of the experience of Paul. How God has extended his mercy upon him in spite of his sinfulness.

The Gospel Reading speaks of the efforts of a merciful God in locating or finding his wayward children.

How to develop your sharing / homily

Identify someone in your life who has shown you mercy and compassion.

What did one do to you? What favors did one give you, even if you did not deserve it?

To appreciate God's mercy better, we have to go back to our sinfulness.

God's mercy is meaningless if we feel we have not offended God or anyone.

In the First Reading, the people offend God by making molten calf which he prohibits in his commandments. God threatens them with punishment (annihilation), but Moses intercedes for them and God changes his mind.

In the Second Reading, Paul thanks God for the trust. Despite his past sins (which deserve punishment), Paul becomes God's worker and missionary. God has shown mercy upon Paul.

The Gospel Reading exhibits God's mercy to sinners. The sinners are supposed to be punished by God, but Jesus eats, drinks and associates with them. He throws a party upon their return.

God's mercy is mysterious. Mercy is an important characteristic of God.

We are far from being God-like when we want immediate punishment to those who offend us. We want their destruction and annihilation, even if they realize their mistakes and sincerely apologize.

We do this by withdrawing our support to them, by not talking to them, by not giving them

another chance, by not forgiving them, by being cold to them.

All the three readings speak of God's mercy.

We Christians must realize what that mercy of God means:

-It is an invitation to be with Jesus.

-It is an invitation to conversion.

-It is an invitation to abandon sin.

The sins identified in the readings are the following:

-Idolatry, worshipping other gods, not the Lord (First Reading).

-Arrogance, blasphemy, being hostile (Second Reading).

-Self-righteousness and refusal to be a brother or sister (Gospel Reading).

The Gospel Reading unmasks those who fail to realize the meaning of God's mercy.

They are self-righteous. They harden their hearts and minds so that Jesus will not touch them.

They decide for themselves how they should be saved. They are their own saviors.

By their self-righteous attitude, they condemn themselves.

Salvation consists in having Jesus as the center of our lives. It consists in listening to him and adopting his values and teachings.

Each Christian should ask oneself how one is responding to God's invitation.

The eucharist is a sure sign of communion

with the Lord, if we participate worthily, honestly and without pretense.

The eucharist, first of all, is the ultimate sign of God's mercy. You can receive him only when you are forgiven (*through the sacrament of reconciliation*), no matter how terribly you have offended God.

In the eucharist, we affirm that God is merciful and compassionate to us.

Let this eucharistic meal be a sign of coming home to him, a reunion with God and with one another as children of God who belong to him.

This eucharist is a meal par excellence which celebrates God's infinite mercy, love and compassion to us sinners who go back to him with humble and sincere hearts.

-Prepared by Fr. Cielo Almazan, OFM

III. OUR CONTEXT

1. As Christians, how are you responding to God's call to a deeper communion with him?

2. What are you doing in order to be more intimate with him?

3. Do you have a prayer life? Are you praying? Do you have interior life? Do you know what is in your heart? Do you find God in your heart?

4. Do you feel his joy? (CA)