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24th Sunday in Ordinary Time - 11 September 2022

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11 September 2022

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Mary Coloe

Introduction

The Gospel today is dangerous! As soon as you hear the opening verse you might think you know what it is about but listen carefully. Parables always have a sting in the tail. Today we could say: Guess who's coming to dinner! But still, we welcome them? Today is Child Protection Sunday which also offers us a challenge in the way we live as Church.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you came to save sinners.
Lord, have mercy.

You show mercy to all.
Christ, have mercy.

You are the glory of the Father.
Lord, have mercy.

Collect

The oration

Look upon us, O God,
Creator and ruler of all things,
and, that we may feel the working of your mercy,
grant that we may serve you with all our heart.

The original context of this prayer is quite intriguing. It is probably a prayer written by Pope Vigilius sometime in the year 538 after the lifting of a siege on Rome. The city had been under prolonged attack from the Arian leader Witiges. Now that the heretical invader had been repelled, the bishop was anxious to return worship to its rightful place. The prayer set the relationship of the Christian people to God within the favour and merciful pardon of God, which underlies all divine creating and guiding, and which is lived out primarily in true Christian worship. While that siege

brought both physical and spiritual hardship to the community, the prayer centred on worship as the locus of experiencing the divine mercy. The more wholeheartedly the community entered into worship, the more fully it was to feel the effects and power of God's favour. Whatever else it experienced, as long as it carried out true worship it knew that it enjoyed God's mercy and favour. Worship served as a reassurance in the face of other difficulties.

Now as a Sunday prayer in Ordinary Time, the historical context of Vigilus' attempt to build up the worship of Rome following the war is left behind. Nevertheless, as a collect for the celebration of the eucharist, the worship context and the dynamic of the prayer remain the same. The more completely the community participates in the liturgy, the more fully the members feel the effect of God's favour, mercy and pardon. Now, instead of being linked to the need for reassurance in face of hostile threats, true worship is linked with obedience to God's commandments and with Christian charity. (Gerard Moore)

First Reading

Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14

Listen carefully to hear God changing God's mind. Compassion eventually wins over rage!

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 50:3-4, 12-13, 17, 19. R. Lk. 15:18

I will rise and go to my father.

The psalm is a prayer from the heart asking forgiveness. It expresses the sentiments of all who seek God's mercy.

Second Reading

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Paul writes to his colleague Timothy and really, he could be writing about us. We are all vulnerable, and at times sinful followers of Jesus, not living up to our ideals, or the Gospel. But we are exactly the ones Jesus came for.

Reflection

Today's Gospel sets up contrasting attitudes to Jesus. The rejects of society, the tax collectors and sinners are seeking his company; the religious people, characterised here by the scribes and Pharisees, are scandalised by Jesus' acceptance of these social outcasts. This situation leads into Jesus speaking a parable, the well-known story of the 'Prodigal Son'. Luke has introduced this parable with two shorter stories

of people who lose and find things, but these introductory stories are misplaced and can distract from the particular parable told by Jesus in this situation.

Too often we hear this as the story of the younger son seeking forgiveness and receiving it, but the point of the story is not the younger son – if this was the case we would only need a one-son parable. The focus on the story lies with the second son. Let's begin reading the parable carefully –

The younger son effectively says to his father, 'I wish you were dead, and then I could get my hands on your money – but since you are not, give me my inheritance now!' This is a shocking thing for any son to say to a parent - especially in that culture which was patriarchal. For the sake of the story, the father acts ridiculously and gives the son what he wants; the son then goes and loses everything and hunger sets in. At this point some see the son as remorseful and desiring to return home because he is sorry, but if we really read the story, this son does not return to the father feeling sorry, his true motive is hunger.

He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!'

He then thinks out what to say to his father that could gain his acceptance, and even has the cheek to ask to be taken on as a *hired* servant, not as a slave, but hired – that is to be paid. Read his words slowly to see what he is really doing – rehearsing what he needs to say to get back into his father's good graces, and to get his hands on money again.

Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.

That father's attitude is extraordinary, and even more so if you consider the father's role in a Middle Eastern family. In that culture his wayward son has brought great shame on his father and on his family. The father would have been expected to disown him or banish him to the slaves' quarters; but no, the father reinstates him as son inside the family home – this is the point of giving him a ring and sandals, since house slaves would usually be barefoot. The father's welcome may bring about true remorse for the son since now he does not give the rehearsed speech but says, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' Notice he has left out the phrase about wanting to be treated like a hired servant! Perhaps in seeing the father's love, he does know sorrow! But remember, this son is not the point of the parable.

The father then throws a lavish party where all the family and villagers are invited. So not only is the son reinstated in the family but also in the village. If it was just a family meal, a smaller animal would have been killed, but a fatted calf needs many at the feast to eat such a large amount of food – remember, no refrigerators, so all must be eaten.

Having seen this son's lavish welcome, the parable then moves to its main point – the position of the older son.

Notice the language this son uses when speaking to his father – 'For all these years I have slaved for you, and I have never disobeyed your command' – and 'this son of yours.' This son has seen himself not as son, but as a slave, just obeying his master;

his brother is not called 'brother' but 'son of yours.' This son does not know his real identity as son. This is why the father must remind him,

Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life.

In the context of the parable, the older son reflects the anger of the scribes and Pharisees. These are the good religious people of Jesus' time who have worked hard to live righteous lives obeying the Law, but perhaps have never really sensed themselves in a loving relationship with God. They see Jesus' welcome to sinners, who do not deserve to be loved by God, and are angered by it. They have not realised that no-one deserves God's love – it is a free and lavish gift. It is the sinners, who know they don't deserve this, who are most grateful and want to celebrate this with Jesus. But the parable points out that there is room at Jesus' table for the Pharisees as well as the sinners. All are welcome, but it means accepting Jesus' table companions. Is this too much to ask?



*while he was still
a long way off his
father saw him.*

Lk 15:20

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

As we call to mind Child Protection Sunday, let us offer to God the needs of our community and of the world. As it says in the Psalm, in every age God has been our refuge, so now we ask with confidence for those special needs.

Petitions

We pray for Pope Francis that his strength and wisdom will continue to be a gift to our Church. May his leadership of love and mercy continue to inspire all other leaders in the Church and make the protection of children in every community a priority.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all the leaders of our world. May they learn to trust in Wisdom rather than their own limited personal resources and may they respect the needs of our earth in this Season of Creation.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who are victims or survivors of sexual abuse by clergy. May they find justice and compassion in the Church and in their families. May the horror of sexual abuse of children and vulnerable people in the Church, and the protection of the perpetrators, become a thing of the past, now and forever.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord

We pray for those who have damaged children in their care throughout society. Through the guidance of those who walk with them, may they find the compassion of God in their journey to remorsefully acknowledge the harm they have caused.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord

We pray for this assembly that the work that we do in our homes, places of study, and the wider world be of benefit to everyone that we meet and help this world to feel the richness of God's mercy.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord

We pray for all the people who have suffered loss and trauma through the death of their loved ones, especially through suicide following sexual abuse. May they come to know that the infinite mercy of God is real.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord

Conclusion

Father, you know our needs before we utter them, so we offer them to you in complete trust and hope. We make these prayers in the name of your Son, Jesus, through the power of the Spirit.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOVK	AOVNG	GA	CWB	CWBII
A trusting psalm	115			455		293
All people that on earth do dwell					613	448
Amazing grace	29			437		450
As gentle as silence				470	621	580
Bread of the world in mercy broken					631	460
Christians, lift up your hearts					650	355
God is forgiveness			55			
Grant to us, O Lord				303	698	291
Lift high the cross						537
My song is love unknown						325
O Father, I know I can count on your mercy					762	122
O Spirit of the living God					777	
Our Father we have wandered					784	297
Praise, my soul, the king of heaven	78				789	588
There's a wideness in God's mercy					838	624
We are children of the living God		15				
We will bring your peace		69				
Yes, I shall arise				214	867	648

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 50: *I will rise and go to my father.*

	CWB	JOBC	LPC
Psalm 50	420	pg. 93	pg. 142

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Create a new heart (FWS) Based on Ps 50/51 [Gathering, Gifts]

Merciful (DOM) [Gifts]