

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14

As we begin our Old Testament study for today, we find ourselves with Moses at Mount Sinai (Horeb). Upon their arrival at Mt. Sinai, God told Moses *“Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle’s wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”* (Exodus 19:3-6, RSV)

Moses then told the elders of the people this message and all the people responded “We will do everything the Lord has said.” Moses delivered their message to God, and God told him to consecrate the people, have them wash their clothes, and be ready on the third day because at that time God will come down on Mt. Sinai in sight of the people; an event to be announced by a trumpet blast.

Moses told the people all this and told them that in preparation for the third day they were to abstain from sexual relations.

On the morning of the appointed day, a thick cloud was over the mountain and a loud trumpet blast sounded. The people could not go up on the mountain to see God, presumably because they had not abstained.

God then gave the ten commandments. Moses then went to the mountain and God gave him instructions on the treatment of Hebrew servants, justice for personal injuries, protection of property, social responsibility, etc. Then God said:

“Behold, I send an angel before you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I have prepared. Give heed to him and hearken to his voice, do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him. But if you harken attentively to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. When my angel goes before you, and brings you in to the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I blot them out, you shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars to pieces. You shall serve the Lord your God, and I will bless your bread and your water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of you. None shall cast her young or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. I will send my terror before you, and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out Hivite, Canaanite, and Hittite from before you. I will not drive them out from before you in one

year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you are increased and possess the land. And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.” (Exodus 23:20-33, RSV)

“Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, ‘All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do.’ And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.’ And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’” Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel.” (Exodus 24:3-10, RSV)

Then Moses went up the mountain and entered the cloud where he stayed for forty days and forty nights during which time he received instructions on construction of the tabernacle, ark of the covenant, priestly garments, altars for incense and burnt offering, oil for anointing, etc. Then God gave Moses the two tablets containing the ten commandments, tablets which were written on both sides (Exodus 32:15). Our reading for today occurs after Moses has received the tablets and before he has descended from the mountain. While Moses was up on the mountain, the people have prevailed upon Aaron to fashion the golden calf and they have worshiped it.

⁷ [T]he LORD said to Moses, “Go down at once to your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, for they have become depraved.

Notice that God is divorcing Himself from the Israelites – He refers to them as Moses’ people.

⁸ They have soon turned aside from the way I pointed out to them, making for themselves a molten calf and worshiping it, sacrificing to it and crying out, ‘This is your God, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!’

They have violated the first commandment and worshiped other gods.

⁹ I see how stiff-necked this people is,” continued the LORD to Moses. ¹⁰ “Let me alone, then, that my wrath may blaze up against them to consume them. Then I will make of you a great nation.”

The nation of Moses is what is being offered.

¹¹ But Moses implored the LORD, his God, saying, “Why, O LORD, should your wrath blaze

up against your own people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with such great power and with so strong a hand?

You cannot divorce them because you made a covenant with Abraham and they are his descendants. Thanks for the offer, but no thanks.

¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, and how you swore to them by your own self, saying, ‘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.’” ¹⁴ So the LORD relented in the punishment he had threatened to inflict on his people.

This story is often pointed to to show the power of intercession. All Moses did was remind God of His covenant relationship with these people because of the covenant with Abraham generations ago. It shows more the power and perpetuity of the covenant than the power of intercession. After all, when you enter into a covenant relationship, you enter into a family relationship and God does not allow divorce.

2nd Reading - 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Having breezed through Philemon last week (this letter also appears on Thursday of the 32nd Week in Ordinary Time, Cycle 2) we move on to 1st Timothy. We will spend three weeks in 1st Timothy and then four weeks in 2nd Timothy.

Paul’s two letters to Timothy are called pastoral letters because they are written to the pastor of the church at Ephesus. They contain a series of rules and recommendations for the good government of the community, whose members are mostly of gentile background.

St. Paul was worried about the damage being done by false teachers and wanted to help the pastor carry out his serious responsibility of guiding his flock. The first letter, which we hear from today, was written from Macedonia around AD 66.

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 expresses his thanks to Christ for the call to preach the gospel. He received strengthening graces at the time of his call, and has been blessed with abundant graces ever since (see Romans 5:20).

¹³ I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and an arrogant man, but I have been mercifully treated because I acted out of ignorance in my unbelief.

Saint Paul was what the heretics are now. Unlike them, however, Paul then had ignorance as an excuse.

¹⁴ Indeed, the grace of our Lord has been abundant, along with the faith and love that are in

Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance:

Worthy of belief

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

This is one of the gospel “reliable sayings” (see Luke 19:10; Matthew 19:13-14).

Of these I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But 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 is a prototype – first to be delivered to Christ – his conversion is a model for all believers who come after him.

¹⁷ To the king of ages, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Doxologies are frequent in Saint Paul’s epistles. The expression “king of ages” was current in post-exilic Judaism and is found in Jewish prayers. Paul is probably quoting an entire verse from an early Christian hymn.

Gospel - Luke 15:1-32

Our gospel reading today encompasses all of Chapter 15 of Luke’s gospel and consists of three parables in which Luke champions the theme that God’s mercy breaks through all human restrictions of how God should act toward sinners. God’s mercy, indeed, is as foolish as a shepherd who abandons 99 sheep to save one, as a woman who turns her house upside down to recover a paltry sum, and as a Jewish father who joyfully welcomes home his wasteful son who has become a Gentile. Because the disciples have such a merciful God, they can embark trustingly and joyfully on Jesus’ way to this God. If the parable of the prodigal son sounds familiar, it is because you last heard it the 4th Sunday in Lent (Cycle C).

^{15:1} The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to him,

Jesus didn’t just appeal to the righteous, but even to those who were less than perfect examples.

² but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

To the Pharisees, a man was known by the company he keeps. Jesus, of course, came to lead them to salvation by setting the example for them to follow.

³ So to them he addressed this parable. ⁴ “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 until he finds it? ⁵ And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders

A lost sheep will lie down helplessly and refuse to budge. The shepherd is forced to carry it over a long distance; this can be done only by putting it on his shoulders. He clutches the forelegs and hind legs with each hand. If he must use his shepherd's staff, he holds all four legs with one hand firmly against his breast.

with great joy

Matthew 18:12-14 also gives the parable of the lost sheep. Matthew emphasizes seeking, Luke the joy of finding.

⁶ and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors

This invitation to friends and neighbors is exclusive to Luke.

and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ I 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. ⁸ "Or what woman having ten coins

Ten silver pieces would be ten days' wages for a laborer. If this is all she has, she is probably poor. It has been speculated that this may have been her dowry.

and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house,

Hoping to hear the tinkle of the coin against the floor.

searching carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And 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.' ¹⁰ In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

This is the reason Jesus associates with these people – much to the chagrin of the Pharisees. Again, Luke emphasizes the joy of finding.

¹¹ Then he said, "A man had two sons, ¹² and 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.

The estate was not necessarily divided upon the father's death – the inheritance was usually given when the son married; when he needed it the most. The eldest got two parts and each other son got one. Sirach argued against this practice of dividing before death (Sirach 33:19-23).

¹³ 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.

Just as we can lose our inheritance (heaven) through sinful acts, the son squanders his through unrestrained sensuality and spendthrift extravagance. Adam and Eve lost the Garden of Eden

through sin.

¹⁴ When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. ¹⁵ So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine.

Do things which only gentiles did. Pigs were unclean animals and anyone who touched them became unclean (Leviticus 11:7-8). The sinner has further isolated himself from God.

¹⁶ And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed,

The fruit of the carob tree.

but nobody gave him any.

He was totally isolated. He must have stolen what food he got to eat. This is the anxiety and emptiness a person feels when he is far from God. This is what enslavement to sin involves (Romans 6:6; Galatians 5:1) – by sinning one loses the freedom of the children of God (Romans 8:21; Galatians 5:13) and hands oneself over to the power of Satan.

¹⁷ Coming 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. ¹⁸ I shall get up and go to my father

His memory of home and his conviction that his father will not turn him away cause the son to reflect and decide to set out on the right road.

and I shall say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

He recognizes his sinfulness with full contrition.

¹⁹ I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.”

I will do penance the rest of my life (sacrifice/self giving).

²⁰ So 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.

Very undignified behavior for an elderly Oriental gentlemen. The father must have been constantly checking the road for some sign of his son and immediately recognized him even at a great distance. God also never gives up on His children and eagerly welcomes them back to His family through the sacrament of penance/reconciliation/confession. When we sincerely confess our sins we again put on Christ and become His brothers; members of God’s family (Romans 8:14-17). God does not greet us with reproaches, but with immediate compassion.

²¹ His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ ²² But 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.

He does not welcome him back as a servant but as a son, a free person (Genesis 41:42).

²³ Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, ²⁴ because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again;

See Ephesians 2:1-7.

he was lost, and has been found.’ Then the celebration began. ²⁵ Now 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. ²⁶ He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. ²⁷ The servant said to him, ‘Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ He became angry,

He thinks his father loves the younger son excessively. His jealousy prevents him from understanding how his father can do so much to celebrate the return of the sinful son – this cuts him off from the joy the whole family feels. It’s true that he was a sinner but it is not up to the older brother to judge him – that prerogative belongs to the father. God’s mercy is so great that man can not grasp it. We should also consider that if God has compassion toward sinners, he must have much more toward those who strive to be faithful to Him.

and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ He 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. ³⁰ But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’ ³¹ He said to him, ‘My son,

After the angry outburst from the elder brother, the father still addresses him affectionately.

you are here with me always; everything I have is yours.

Your inheritance is secure. Just because your brother has returned, your share is not reduced.

³² But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’”