

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time “C” Cycle September 11, 2016

Profound insight and wisdom often comes from many sources. In one of Dennis the Menace comic strips, Dennis and his friend Joey, who often get into mischief, are shown enjoying ice cream cones given to them by their kindly neighbor, Mrs. Wilson. Dennis turns to Joey and says: “you know Mrs. Wilson didn’t give us ice cream because we are good, but because she is so good.”

Dennis’ comment neatly sums up the message of today’s Scriptures, which tell us of the merciful forgiveness and love of God for all of us, even for the worst of sinners.

The first reading, from the Old Testament Book of Exodus, describes in very human terms God’s righteous anger against his own chosen people who had fashioned and worshipped an idol, a golden calf. Through the prayerful intercession of Moses, the Lord relents, shows mercy, forgives, and restates his promises to make of his people a great nation.

Saint Paul, in the second reading from his letter to Timothy, gives an account of his conversion to Christ. He confesses his arrogance and hatred in persecuting the disciples. He states: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am the foremost.” He then thanks God for his merciful forgiveness and for his calling to spread the Gospel.

The Gospel reading is taken from the entire fifteenth chapter of Saint Luke, who gives us Jesus’ three parables illustrating God’s great mercy: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost prodigal son. More accurately they could also be called the lost and found sheep, the lost and found coin, and the lost and found son.

The Lord is a loving and merciful shepherd who actively searches for even one person who strays from him. Just like the woman in the parable, the Lord is relentless in searching for the lost sinner. Above all, God is like the father who longs for his wayward and wasteful son to return and to welcome with not only with merciful forgiveness but with exuberant joy.

The first two parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin show God's great initiative in seeking the lost. The parable of the prodigal son stresses the need for the sinner to come to his/her senses, to repent, and to return home trusting in God's welcoming mercy.

All of us, I dare say, are sinners at least to some extent. Hopefully, we are not guilty of grave or mortal sin too often. We are perhaps sometimes guilty of impatience, rash judgment, unkind words, lack of charity, failure to be merciful to others, or some other sin. We have a remedy in seeking God's merciful forgiveness through our contrite prayers and the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has declared this a jubilee Year of Mercy. He exhorts us to be thankful for God's mercy and to be mindful of the Lord's words: "merciful like the Father," and to extend mercy to one another.

Paraphrasing Dennis the Menace we confidently say and believe: "God loves us and is merciful because he is so good."