

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

24th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Exodus 32.7-11, 13-14)

Israel Rebels in the Desert

We start off with a fine argument between the Lord and Moses. 'Your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt', says the Lord to Moses. 'Your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt', says Moses to the Lord. Like parents, each blames the other for a misbehaving child. As soon as Moses' back was turned, Israel made itself an idol in the form of a golden calf - or rather a golden bull, called a 'calf' merely to be derisory - after the model of the local storm gods.

The principal point is that, for all his blazing anger, the Lord cannot maintain his wrath against the people to whom he has promised an eternal inheritance. Once again, God changes his mind. His love of his people triumphs over his anger.

In the next chapter, he passes before Moses and cries out the meaning of the name 'the Lord': a God of mercy and forgiveness, slow to anger, rich in faithful love and constancy, a meaning of the name that will echo down the pages of the scripture. The reading prepares us for the story of the Prodigal Son in the gospel.

Question:

Is God always ready to forgive?

Can anything stop it?

Second reading:

(1 Timothy 1.12-17)

Paul the Sinner

We read the two letters to Timothy over the next seven Sundays. Many scholars hold that, in accordance with a contemporary convention, the letters to Timothy and Titus were not actually written by Paul, but by a faithful disciple, still inspired by Paul, who puts what Paul would have said in the particular circumstances. Paul is represented as directing his two principal co-operators in their organization of Church structures.

These letters present a valuable picture of the problems of the Church, a generation or two after Paul, settling into an organizational pattern towards the end of the first century, and finding its way among the values of Hellenistic society.

In the present reading, Paul's open confession of his ferocious way of life before his conversion to Christianity, and the mercy he received from the Lord, pairs well with the record of divine mercy in the other two readings. The final little confession of faith in Christ as Saviour is one of the many declarations of Christological doctrine that give a special richness to these letters. Traditional formulations of doctrine are especially valued guidelines in these letters.

Question:

Pray about an occasion when the grace of God drew you back from disaster.

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Gospel:

(Luke 15.1-32)

Forgiveness

Today's gospel gives us three particularly attractive Lukan stories of forgiveness. The first two form a typical Lukan pair. First comes the story of the lost sheep, which comes also in Matthew. Luke, however, puts all the accent on the joy in heaven at the return of the sinner.

Then, to the story of the man looking for his sheep, Luke adds the story of a woman looking for her lost coin. He is always careful to show that women have an equal part in the Kingdom with men. So he deliberately pairs Zechariah and Mary, Simeon and Anna, Jairus' daughter raised to life with the Widow of Naim's son, and so on.

The main story, however, is the Prodigal Son, told with all Luke's love, artistry and delicacy of character study: the wastrel son who goes back home simply because he is hungry; the loving father perpetually on the lookout, running to meet the son, interrupting the carefully prepared speech and pampering the returned wastrel; the disgruntled stay at home who invents slanders about the other's 'loose women' and is gently corrected by his father's 'your brother'. An unforgettable picture of the overflowing love and forgiveness of God.

Question:

Is there anyone you have not yet forgiven?
