

24th Sunday C

CHRIST WELCOMES SINNERS

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www.sjti.ac.za/resources_homily.htm

First Reading: Exodus 32:7-11. 13-14
Response: *"I will leave this house and go to my father"* (Lk. 15:18)
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 50:3-4,12-13,17,19
Second Reading: Timothy 1:12-17
Gospel: Luke 15:1-32

The Risen Lord, אֲדֹנָי נֵעוֹר , is in our midst, welcoming us in his sacraments, forgiving our sins and giving new life. See the power of Moses' intercession for the people and much more the power of Christ in our lives.

The People have sinned, choosing the golden calf instead of God. God's justice warrants their destruction. *"But Moses pleaded with the Lord his God"* (Ex.32:11) for mercy.

God listens to the prayer of Moses and *"relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened"* (Ex.32:14). Such is power of prayer and the readiness of God to forgive.

"I will leave this house and go to my father" (Lk. 15:18). The broken sinner knows he can come back to his loving God. He *"will wash away my guilt and cleanse me from my sin"* (Ps.50:2).

The psalmist entrusts his brokenness to the tremendous love of God who *"will not cast me away from his presence nor deprive me of his holy spirit"* (Ps.50:11) but will give me a new clean and *"pure heart"* (Ps. 10). This is the most famous of the seven penitential psalms in the Bible.

Paul, once an enemy of Christ, now converted, thanks *"Christ Jesus who judged me faithful enough to call me into his service even though I used to be a blasphemer"* (1 Tm. 1:12).

What Jesus did for Paul, he sees God doing for all. *"Christ Jesus came to the world to save sinners"* (1Tm. 1:15). This is Paul's experience and foundation of his mission to the world.

In the Gospel, Jesus is accused of *"welcoming and eating with sinners"* (Lk.15:1). Jesus' reply is the parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin and Lost Son where the father is an expression of divine gladness welcoming back the repentant sinner. Note the role of the indignant brother.

The shepherd, woman and father in the parables portray God's joy in recovering that which was lost. *"There will be rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner"* (Lk. 15:10). The older son, like the Jewish elders, is scandalized by the warm welcome of sinners. *Where are we?*

Gospel of Luke (15:1-32) gives three parables. Reflect especially upon the 'Prodigal Son'.

Liturgy is where we tell the Lord "I am not worthy." *How does Jesus welcome us?*

Doctrine: Sin and forgiveness are based on free will. The father does not force the son to stay at home nor force him to come back. *How do we respond to the grace of God?*

Witness: *Can we forgive others like the Father who welcomes and forgives us?*

FOR THE CHILDREN

Bible: Read and reflect upon the parable of the Prodigal Son in today's Gospel (Lk.15:11-32). Discuss the role of the characters in the story.

Mass: *When do we say, as the prodigal, "Lord I am not worthy" and Jesus reaches out to us?*

Teaching: The father is happy when the son comes home, so is God when we tell him we're sorry.

Life: *What are ways of coming to God for forgiveness?* Show forgiveness and welcome others.

FOR TEENAGERS (*Shared Christian Praxis*)

What does forgiveness mean to you? What is your understanding of welcome?

Share your experience of being forgiven and forgiving others and feeling welcome.

Give Church teaching (catechesis) on forgiveness and how God welcomes us back joyfully.

How much does your life and Christ's way coincide or contradict? What will you do?

Can you come to the Lord and work with him, bringing others into the joy of the Kingdom?

RCIA CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (CCC)

For Jesus part: "He gave scandal when he identified his merciful conduct towards sinners with God's own attitude towards them. He went so far as to hint that by sharing the table of sinners he was admitting them to the messianic banquet. But it was most especially by forgiving sins that Jesus placed the religious authorities of Israel on the horns of a dilemma..." "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (CCC 589).

For sinner's part: "To receive God's mercy, we must admit our faults. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (CCC 1847)

LIFE EXPERIENCE

I read 'The Silent Sermon.' It was about a member who stopped going to church. The preacher visited him on a chilly evening and found the man at home sitting before a blazing fire. He welcomed him to sit comfortably near the fireplace. The preacher made himself at home but said nothing. In the silence they contemplated the dancing flame around the burning logs. After a while, the preacher took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and place it to one side of the hearth, then sat back silently in his chair. The host watched all this quietly. After a momentary glow, the ember was soon dead and cold.

After a long silence, the preacher got up to leave. He slowly picked up the cold and dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. It began to glow again with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it. As the preacher reached the door, his host said, with a tear running down his cheek, "Thank you so much for your visit, especially for the firey sermon. I will be coming back to Church." Silence and action can speak louder than words, when less said, more is heard; and says the ancient Greek, in choosing his time, "a wise man limits his speeches." (i)

(i) **ARISTOPHANES. The Poet and the Women** v.185. *Transl. David Barrett.* Penguin Classics, London. 1964. p.106.

LITTLE ANGELINA

Angelina is a new altar-server. Sometimes she is unsure about her role in the liturgy. It depends which priest is saying Mass. She sees one priest as grumpy and impatient, scolding the altar-servers when they make a mistake. The other is kind and gentle and gives her confidence. Little wonder, she always hopes the second will be celebrating Mass.

IMPORTANT WORD: "Forgiveness"

The first reading today shows the sin of Israel, worshipping the golden calf. They deserve God's anger, however God, with a prayer from Moses, ends up forgiving and restoring them to himself. In spite of our sins, we can come to the Lord and pray for forgiveness. The Lord's Prayer is the most beautiful prayer, asking our loving Father to forgive us, and reminds us to also forgive others as they sin against us. Sometimes we feel that our offenders don't deserve our forgiveness. Remember, how God welcomes you as a sinner, not reluctantly but joyfully, inviting you to share in his gifts. It is a joy that God wants you to pass on to others. You belong to the loving arms of the Father and others belong there as well and in your loving arms. And so asks the incredulous believer: "Are we really the stuff that dreams are made of?" (i)

(i) **HARRIS Sam. "THE END OF FAITH." Reason in Exile.** W.W. Norton & Co. New York. 2005. p.41.

Watchword: “**Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you**” (Lk. 15:18)

Hebrew: אבי חטאתי לשמים ולפניך Avi *hata'ti lashamayim ulefaneyka.*

Greek: Πater ημαρτον εις τον ουρανον και ενωπιον σου.
Pater, hemarton eis ton ouranon kai enopion sou.

Latin: **Pater, peccavi in caelum et coram te.**

Portuguese: **Pai, pequei contra o ceu e perante ti.**

Spanish: **Padre, he pecado contra el cielo y contra ti.**

French: **Mon pere, j'ai peche contre Dieu et contre toi.**

German: **Vater, ich habe gesündigt gegen den Himmel und vor dir.**

Afrikaans: **Pa, ek het teen God en teen Pa gesondig.**

Zulu: **Baba, ngonile phambi kwezulu naphambi kwakho.**

Xhosa: **Bawo, ndimonile uThixo, nawe ndikonile.**

Sotho: **Ntate, ke sitetswe lehodimo le wena.**

Irish: **A athair, pheacaigh me in agaidh na bhflaitheas agus i do lathairse.**