

Homily St Pius & St Anthony 24th Sunday Ordinary Year C1

Do you remember the old Sesame Street game that came with a song, “One of these things is not like the other...” It would picture four things, three alike and the fourth clearly not like the others. Maybe three boxes showing red balloons, and one blue? Or of fruits, one apple, one orange, one banana, and then a cat? You had to determine the commonality between the grouped items. I think that is a good lead in, for today’s gospel, where we have a set of parables about sheep, coins and sons. What’s a common link in this group between these parables? For sure, something keeps getting lost (okay that is the bad news), but the good news in all three is that either a faithful shepherd, a diligent housekeeper or a loving father (all images of God) work so hard to find and draw everything back together. They seek and seek until they find. So with the lost sheep we heard that one strayed off, but the observant shepherd takes off and finds the lost one. Then we heard about a householder woman who came with one coin short, and she takes the house apart, to discover where that coin went – under what table it rolled under or into what pile of clothes it fell and was buried. And then a younger son (one of two) also strayed off the plantation until discovering himself and then he turns back to his family, where his father has been daily scanning the horizon hoping for his return. In all three we have something/someone lost who needs discovering/finding. Yet, what is most surprising to me in all of these parables is the extravagance and exorbitance of the celebrations afterward, way beyond any simple calculation of regained lost. What I mean, is notice that in all three findings, great lengths are taken to recover what’s lost, and all result in lavish banquet celebrations. Maybe you thought it this too, but to consider one lost coin, isn’t it a bit much-extreme, to dedicate a whole day to taking the house apart to find it. It said she lit her lamp, so there is extra oil costs to run the lamp overtime, not to mention lost wage/time spent searching, and then she called her friends in to party (and we don’t invite people to a feast with a bare table-so count on her having quite the table spread with meats and sweets). All of this over one single coin. Or the case of the shepherd, missing only one sheep of a hundred, we could’ve thought, “Well, wait you still have ninety nine”- it wasn’t a dozen gone off, what’s just the one with so many others-why risk further possible losses-write it off. Or with the father, whose son runs off to selfishly do his own thing, it might be thought that if he was so starry-eyed, he probably wasn’t pulling his own weight around the farm anyway. But as

his father catches sight of him returning, he runs to the son (didn't make the son crawl back!) , and he lavishes us on him a costly new robe, new ring and prize calf killed sumptuous banquet to celebrate with all surrounding home association neighbors. That all seems so excessive. Until –until we realize these parables tell us how much God loves each one (every unique one of us) each child of His. Such efforts are extreme considering that we humans may coldly calculate to simply cut off the loss and move on. But not with God! God goes after losses (*every lost one of us*), and salvages, or better said, recovers or redeems losses-converting them to gains! The shepherd, the homemaker and father have no peace until the units are restored or the gang is all back together again, the sets are refilled, or the partials made whole again.

This piece of understanding is what makes sense, of the intense over-the-top 'seeking and searching' in each case. The complete set needs refilling, or redeeming, not just the single one, but the fact that the whole set can be restored with the single one back in its intended place ***with everything else***. I am sure that we have all felt similar obsessing drives to find something when we knew it was the last of something (one of kind), or that it completed a set. As a kid we were always losing our baseball cards (no big deal), until I lost the card for the catcher Carlton Fisk, from my favorite team-the Boston Red Sox; I had all the rest of the players-but it didn't matter, the set just didn't mean anything to me anymore, until I got back that one card again. Or I also collected stamps as a kid and the single issue stamps were so easy to get a hold of (one and done) but the Postal Service seemed to love putting out series of 6-8 stamps like types of butterflies for nature conservancy, or a set of poets, (*only later did someone let me in on why they put out popular sets like that, to encourage the collecting of them-saved never used to have to supply the service that would come with purchase of such paper!*). But those sets would light us kids up to go searching feverishly to round up each stamp in the collection-we knock on neighbors' doors asking for old envelopes to save stamps! Maybe we have some coin collectors in here, who went about saving the whole set of US Mint quarters, one for each state. You anxiously awaited each new state's release to build the whole collection. And if you happened to have one quarter slip out of its case and be lost, you'd be just like the little lady in the gospel turning everything upside down to get back that ONE. Why? Because that one completes the set, it makes whole again what was only partial, while the one was lost. Think of the whole units in our parables again; a nice even 100, then

another even-denomination of ten, and then a perfect pair (two). With the sons, this is especially clear to me, because how often have we felt the incompleteness when a duo is not together! Or when twins/pair are not side by side. Earlier I spoke of Sesame Street, consider this: what is Bert without Ernie? OR Tom without Jerry, Gumby without Pokey, Starsky without Hutch, Cher without Sonny, Abbot without Costello. They have to be together. It completes the set. And so God is saying to us through these parables, that all of us being His children, we all belong and He will spare no expense- He will not short any sacrifice to ensure that we are brought back together again, if we come apart, or fall away. Like the searching shepherd, the hardworking home-keeper, and the faithful father, God will come seeking us (each precious child of His) to restore us again to his intended unity, making whole again what he created to be one, bringing us back together again into His fold. That is such good news, that each of us irreplaceable, precious children of God, that He will seek us out, and feast in our return to Him.