

[Readings: Exodus 32:7-14, Psalm 51; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 5:1-32]

Imagine that you're on a foreign country, ready to return home. You arrive at the airport and reach into your bag for your passport, knowing that you'll need it to exit the country. It's not there. You look in another pocket; also not there. You panic, looking through every pocket of your bag. Finally, you remember that you put your passport in your coat, finding it just in time before the plane leaves.

When we lose something important, we begin to search for it with urgency. In the end, a passport is just a passport, replaceable through a complicated visit to an embassy. But what parent has not experienced overwhelming urgency when they can't find their child in a crowd? What goes through the child's mind when their parents are out of view? No matter how young we are or how old we are, even if we don't admit it out loud, we cry out inside for our parents, the "grown-ups" to protect us. There are so many reports that when a military person suffers a fatal injury, they cry out for the mom or dad.

We see the themes of being lost and urgency in all three Readings today. And on this Catechetical Sunday, we apply it to our own journeys of faith.

The Scriptures describe a God who responds urgently in response to potential losses. In our First Reading, God has entered a covenant with Israel, choosing them among all the nations. This God led Israel through the sea dry-shod, saving them from slavery at the hands of the Egyptians.

And yet, Israel is lost. While Moses is receiving the Law from God, they have worshipped a golden calf. They have turned away from the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob.

God suggests to Moses that God can start again with just him. Get rid of this people, this stiff-necked nation. Have you ever felt rejected by God? Why?

But Moses intervenes, reminding God that such losses are not acceptable. For the people who would be left behind are not just any nation, but the one chosen by God. How could God abandon his beloved?

Moses recognizes something that Israel doesn't yet. They are God's beloved, chosen from the beginning. God doesn't want to lose them, and will respond with urgency.

Much of the Old Testament deals with this urgent response of a God who loves, even when it hurts. ***The first lesson we learn today is to believe that you are never alone, and even more, that you are truly loved by God.*** And by His people, the Church.

Jesus' three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son take up this Old Testament narrative, expanding it to all the nations. The Pharisees are grumbling. Jesus dines with sinners. He meets with tax collectors. What could He be doing? Do YOU feel worthy to dine with Jesus at His altar table?

But God's urgency is different than our own. Happily, for our sake, God is not enacting vendettas against ungrateful men and women and children.

God searches. God seeks. God invites men and women and teens and children back into the covenant, the new covenant of love unto the end.

In our Second Reading, St. Paul uses the experiences of his own life to persuade others to a more faithful life in Christ. He didn't start out right. He started out arresting, jailing, bullying, persecuting and even killing those former Jews who were beginning to follow a new "Way." The Way of Christianity.

Hiding nothing, St. Paul freely admits his past, and expresses his gratitude that God chose HIM of ALL people to become one of His second-generation apostles. The lesson to learn here is that even in those circumstances in our lives that can have us hiding in shame, we can find God's grace at work. And from this insight comes a great truth: Jesus came to save people like St. Paul, people like us. Sinners can be so mired in the muck of their lives that they are hopelessly stuck and need a Savior to extract them from the mess of their own making. You and I need that Savior as much as St. Paul did. You and I are the lost people. The lost sheep. The lost coin. The Prodigal Child. ***I invite you to pray, to give to God, give to Jesus, the biggest mess, the worst pile of trash, everything that is broken in you right now.*** Jesus works best with this kind of material when He puts it all back together, and makes something beautiful out of it all!

St. Paul is saying, "Look at the shameful, immoral and sinful things I did. Yet God chose ME to bring His Good News to the nations. If God could show mercy to one like ME, why would you even question that He could be merciful to YOU?" Sometimes we even need to forgive not only ourselves, but God Himself. Terrible things happen in our human lives, and that is part of being human. But we unfortunately and unfairly blame God, spending years with unforgiveness in our hearts. As with any anger or

resentment, if we carry it around with us long enough, it only eats us up inside, even leading to heart attacks. It drags us down and destroys our peace of mind. We have to learn to be patient with God as God is patient with us.

We learn here that our God meets us where we are. God loves us where we are, but doesn't want us to stay there. God does not expect perfection, before we are lavished with God's generous forgiveness and reconciliation.

The Archdiocese of Detroit has developed a learning curriculum to be used by every parish in the Archdiocese, by every school, and by every parish faith formation program. It goes from 1st grade to Junior High and Confirmation preparation. We're going to look at it and blend it in with what we already have.

The proposed process is a simple one, but it may take a lifetime:

Encounter Christ, Grow in Christ, Witness to Christ.

This is Catechetical Sunday. We will be commissioning our catechists, and blessing our students' parents, who are called to be the first and best teachers of their children in the ways of faith. Here at the 5:00 PM Vigil Mass, we are enrolling our Confirmation candidates for this year's formation.

The call to repentance is not that we are to be perfect and sinless before God can love us. It is the realization that we are precious in God's eyes right now. We also realize that all are offered God's forgiveness, but that not all embrace it. You and I can choose to come home, or to stay in the far country. You simply have to say "Yes" to the God Who has found you, Who has brought you home and Who, through this Eucharist, gives us all new life. AMEN!