

24TH SUNDAY ORD. (C)

THE LORD HATES SIN BUT LOVES THE SINNER

September 10/11, 2022

The idea about God for many people is that He wants to punish always. It may be because those in authority, and sometimes our parents chastise and punish us when we go wrong. We think God acts in the same way.

Today's readings should help us change that mentality about God. In the first reading, God was not happy that the Israelites had turned their backs towards Him by worshipping idols. He told Moses what was happening, and He disclosed His intention to him. Moses pleaded with God and reminded Him of the promise He made for the people. God changed His mind and did not punish them. Was Moses wiser than God? No. It shows how merciful He is and how He listens to the righteous and ready to forgive.

St. Paul narrates how God had mercy on him and called him to the ministry, even though he was a big sinner. He called himself the worst of sinners. According to him, Christ displayed His patience for all who would come to believe in Him through his conversion.

The mercy of God was displayed by the shepherd and the woman who searched for their lost sheep and coin, and most especially, by the father of the two brothers we heard in the gospel. In all the three events, there was an urgent need to find the lost, and there was great joy at the end. The parables indicate that each sheep, each coin, and everyone is important to the owner. So, every person is important to God.

God has given us freedom to do what we want to do, but He wants us to use this freedom in the right way. Very often, we abuse this freedom. We see that in the life of the Israelites; instead of worshipping God they chose to worship a calf. It was the same with the younger son who chose to get his property and leave home. His father did not prevent him from going but allowed him to go. But immature freedom and ignorance destroyed him.

What happens when we choose to move away from God to live our own lives the way we want? We expose ourselves to all kinds of evil and hardships. The Israelites suffered in so many ways for being disobedient to God. The prodigal son also suffered for leaving the house. He lost everything including the friends who enjoyed with him the wealth he got from the father. He

reduced himself to the level of a pig, because he was forced to eat the food of pigs. Later, he decided to go home to be a servant but not a son. He realized that he had lost his dignity as a son. He rehearsed what he was to tell the father to accept him back as a laborer.

At certain times too, I behave like the Scribes and Pharisees who complained about the sinners drawing near to Jesus, and the older son who did not want to see his brother back. That can be a sign of selfishness, arrogance and hatred. I do not even know the graces we receive by being faithful to God.

I am taught today that I can easily abuse the freedom given to me by God. But God is merciful and patient, slow to punish. He makes His intentions known before He acts, and He is ready to listen to my plea for forgiveness. He is looking forward to seeing me return and He is happy to see me back. He does not hear my excuses of why I left Him. He wants me to return so that He makes me a king and a great person as seen in the lives of many people who were sinners but became great in the Lord, like Paul, Levi, Mary Magdalene, Francis of Assisi, and many others. He wants me to experience the joy of heaven and avoid the pains of hell. He wants me to enjoy the everlasting banquet.

This is His message today: "Shake off all the sins you have committed against me, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why are you so anxious to die, House of Israel? I take no pleasure in the death of anyone – it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks. Repent and live" (Ez.18:31-32).