

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE C

Exodus 32: 7-14
1 Timothy 1: 12-17
Luke 15: 1-32

OPENING PRAYER

(A standing crucifix and an unlit votive candle are arranged on a table in the gathering place. As the session begins, the candle is lit and the leader invites members to quiet themselves to acknowledge God's presence in their midst. After a few moments of silence, some instrumental music conducive to reflection is played. The prayer then continues as follows.)

Leader: I will rise and go to my father.

All: I will rise and go to my father.

Leader: Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt
and of my sin cleanse me.

All: I will rise and go to my father.

Leader: A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
Cast me not out from your presence,
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

All: I will rise and go to my father.

Leader: O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.
My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit;
a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn.



All: I will rise and go to my father.

Leader: God of love, you call us into a deeper relationship. As we share and reflect with one another, may your Spirit illuminate for us your wisdom.

All: Amen.

Psalm 51: 3-4, 12-13, 17, 19

COMMENTARY

This week's readings are rich with images. The lessons abound. Jesus is speaking with the scribes and Pharisees, learned men in the Jewish scripture. They are complaining because Jesus associates himself with sinners. Jesus tells three parables to show God's immeasurable love and care for all God's people. In each of the parables there is the persistent seeking of the lost one, followed by joy and celebration when the lost is found.

Jesus relates three events that seemed incomprehensible to his listeners. A shepherd would not leave sheep alone in the desert. The careful search for one coin on the part of the woman when she has nine left is one thing, but her celebration upon finding it seems excessive. The prodigal son broke all ties, committed unpardonable cultural offenses and yet when he returned home his father forgave him. He resumed his full status alongside his brother who stayed by his father's side.

In each of the parables God is the seeker and each of us is the one lost. These parables seek to transform us. They are about coming to see our need for God. They are about being called back into relationship with God when we have been unfaithful, so that we may yet become all that God has created us to be. These parables are about how important each one of us is to our God. These parables are about the unfathomable, complete love of God for us no matter how far we wander. God's love always enfolds us.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ Recall a time when you felt separated from God. How did it feel? How did you find your way?

- ◆ Which of these parables speaks most to your life? With whom do you identify?
- ◆ Tell of a time you were able to help someone find his/her way back into awareness of God's relationship with them.
- ◆ Reflect on how someone's story about turning her/his life around touched your life.

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week to sit with whichever of this week's three parables speaks most directly to you these days. Open yourself to God's searching and forgiving love.
- ◆ Take some steps this week to mend a strained or broken relationship with a family member, co-worker or someone else in your life.
- ◆ Seek out an opportunity to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites the community to some time of silent reflection on the words of wisdom heard and shared in this session.)

All: Have mercy on me, God, in your goodness;
 in your abundant compassion blot out my offense.
 Wash away all my guilt;
 from my sin cleanse me.
 A clean heart create for me, God;
 renew in me a steadfast spirit.
 Lord, open my lips;
 my mouth will proclaim your praise.

Psalm 51: 3-4, 12, 17



(The session closes with the praying of the Lord's Prayer and the exchange of the sign of peace.)