

LOVE PLUS TRUST

It is quite unusual to have a Mass in which all the readings, antiphons and other changeable parts of Mass all combine together to form the main theme. This Sunday it happens! Namely, that of divine forgiveness, It is the theme of Divine mercy, divine love. The entrance antiphon asks God to hear the prayers of all who ask him. In the opening prayer everyone prays that each person may know God's forgiveness in their lives, truly experiencing divine forgiveness.

The first reading taken from the Book of Exodus, recounts an episode that took place while the Israelites were trekking through the desert. They had stopped at the foot of the Mountain of God, Mt. Horeb. Moses and his trusted aide Joshua had gone to the top of the mountain and were hidden from view by a great cloud; Moses was talking with God when God suddenly told Moses that the Israelites had given way to idolatry. As Moses and Joshua came down the mountain they could hear the sounds of a great party going on. Joshua thought it was simply a party, but Moses recognized it as revelry and knew instinctively that the people had turned to idolatry. They had fashioned a molten calf and were worshiping it! God tells Moses that he intends to destroy these people but Moses implores the Lord to please, please forgive them. Because of Moses' plea, God does not destroy them, but forgives them and gives them another chance.

The psalm response is a prayer for the mercy of God. In the Second Reading from a letter of Paul to his close and loved assistant, Timothy, Paul recounts how he himself once was totally opposed to Christ and his teaching, but that through the Mercy of God and his forgiveness, he was accepted by Christ to be his Apostle to the pagans. Paul goes on to explain how Christ came to save sinners, all sinners, and not to condemn them and points out how Christ used great patience with sinners. Then in the Gospel acclamation, we hear "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ and has entrusted to all of us the message of reconciliation."

Finally in the Gospel, we hear Christ first giving two examples of the limits God goes to in bringing sinners back to reality and to feeling the joy of forgiveness and reconciliation and the joy God has in bringing sinners back to himself. His first example is the joy of a shepherd finding his lost sheep and in the second example the joy of a woman who has just found here lost coins.

It is then that Christ gives his most famous story of forgiveness in the tale of the wayward son. Most of this story centers around the youngest son who, while still only a youth wants his share of his ultimate inheritance and he wants it now. His father does not like the idea but because of his love for his son does as he asks him to do, knowing all along that this was really not the right thing to do on his part and certainly not the right thing for the son to be demanding. Yet note, that though the father knows what is going to happen, he still desperately wants to trust his son, hoping really beyond hope that all will turn out well.

Everyone knows the ultimate outcome, how the son squanders his inheritance, then faces not just starvation but most likely ultimate death, all of which wakes him up and he determines to throw himself totally on the mercy of his Father. As all remember, the father goes over-board in forgiving his son and restores to him almost everything he had lost through his youthful inexperience.

But the story does not stop there. The other son now appears, angry as can be at his brother and also at his father. He claims that all his life he has tried very hard to do everything his father wanted. He is also angry that his brother now gets everything after doing so much harm while he himself has not once gotten not even a kid goat to have a small dinner with his friends. This son however, has in some ways done his father more injustice than his brother and he does not realize it. Not once did he ever ask his father for a favor! Not once did he really trust his father. He simply expected it all to be done his way, all the way without his needing to ask (which he probably considered to be begging, something way beneath his dignity!)

This brings up the real question of just how much do we trust our God? We know he will forgive; have we every asked him? We may feel we are faithful, but do we ask him to be a real part of our lives? Do we ever take the initiative? Or do we expect him to do it all. Is God really are totally trusted friend?

Fr. Andy, S.J.