

24<sup>th</sup> Sunday- C 2010  
Deacon Pat Hall

[Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14](#); [1 Timothy 1:12-17](#); [Luke 15:1-32](#)

*Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/nab/091210.shtml>*

*[Prior to proclamation]*

Please be seated. Jesus has three parables to share with you. Feel free to enter into the stories or imagine how the stories touch your life today.

*[After Proclamation]*

Lost and found... that could be a theme for our lives.

We're certainly familiar with loss. Yesterday was the 9<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. Approximately 3000 people from over 90 countries lost their lives in New York, Pennsylvania and at the Pentagon that day.<sup>1</sup> I was privileged to be part of a critical incident stress management team that debriefed surviving NYPD officers. I heard their stories of loss first-hand. The attacks precipitated events that led to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq where there have been over 100,000 civilian and 7000 coalition deaths.<sup>2</sup>

Today, we argue about a mosque in Manhattan... and Quran burning.

We know loss on a personal level. A friend of mine, also retired from Public Safety, is in the hospital in dire straights. He is praying for a lung transplant that may not come in time.

One needn't go further than the Community Book of Prayers out in our vestibule to understand the scary challenges and losses our families face.

Our readings today try to discover meaning in this world of loss.

The reading from Exodus is about a people who have lost faith in an unseen God. The story portrays God as reacting violently to this rejection, to the point that he is ready to obliterate the people for their infidelity—understandable from a human point of view. It is Moses who acts as the foil to bring out God's true reaction to our

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-American casualties of the September 11%2C 2001 attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-American_casualties_of_the_September_11%2C_2001_attacks)

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties of the Iraq War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties_of_the_Iraq_War) ,  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/aug/10/afghanistan-civilian-casualties-statistics> & <http://icasualties.org/>

unfaithfulness. God's reaction is to remain faithful to his lost people. I remember Fr. Ken preaching that the whole Bible is the story of God's relentless love pursuit of us.

In the letter attributed to Paul, he admits that he was the most ignorant and arrogant of blasphemers. He says that if our Lord saved such a lost one as Paul, we can have hope in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Our three parables answer the Pharisees' accusation that Jesus eats with sinners. The parables point to God's love for each and every one of us.

The shepherd drops everything to rescue the one errant sheep. The woman turns her house upside down in search of the one coin and when she finds it she calls together her neighbors. I wonder how many coins that party cost?

In each of these first two stories Jesus asks, "and who among you would not do the same?" Well, I don't think anyone I know would. Who would abandon 99 sheep to potential predators to search for one sheep without even any assurance of finding it? I already questioned the reasonableness of the woman throwing a costly party upon finding her coin.

When I worked at a foundry, we had an acceptable scrap level. We would not interrupt the production flow of dozens of castings to try to fix one bad casting. We'd just throw the bad casting back into the furnace—a scary thought that I **do not** want to make into a metaphor for you and me.

But you see the shepherd and the woman in these stories do not represent you and me. Bible stories may tell us much about our human character and our responsibilities to each other, but they are ultimately revelation about God: who God is and what God's relationship is with us.

Our next God-figure is of course the father in the return of the prodigal son. Jesus' parable addresses the two groups he was facing: the sinners and the Pharisees. The son who took his inheritance and spent it in dissipation (look it up, I had to) well, he represents the sinners. The elder son represents the self-righteousness and resentment of the Pharisees.<sup>3</sup> While both groups saw themselves as opposite to each other, Jesus saw them as the same, as lost daughters and sons. They both suffered from the same affliction- the failure to rejoice.<sup>4</sup> What is the father's response to his sons? He brings them to himself in love, celebration and joy.

The ultimate point of our lost and found stories is our failure to **rejoice**. Each story we listened to results in gratitude. Our failure to get it is because we think the story is too good to be true. We all harbor the guilt that we are undeserving. Just like we cast off our scrap, we often do the same spiritually—we hedge our bets. We are

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<sup>3</sup> *Commentaries on the Sunday Scriptures*, John J. Castelot, p. 49

<sup>4</sup> *The Relentless Widow*, John Shea, p. 81

afraid to love God with the same abandon with which he loves us. It is the primal fear of unreturned love. It reminds one of the first romantic kiss, the tension when you go to make the move, the fear that the intention might not be returned. God does not hedge his bets when it comes to us. God tells us, "What does 'undeserving' have to do with it? You are my daughter. You are my son. I love you." That is why we dare to call Jesus, brother and Mary, mother.

It is God's job to save us. It is our job to celebrate. But, for me to go to those thousands of families who have lost loved ones and tell them to celebrate could sound as trite as the song, *Don't worry, be happy*. The challenge for us is that none of us can really accept how wonderful God's news for us truly is. We live in the practical world of hedged bets and partially fulfilled promises. God's love is so abundant, that we are afraid to believe it.

We need God's grace to help us suspend our skepticism. He offers that grace as he makes himself present in Body and Blood at this altar today. We are undeserving and yet he withholds nothing from us as we "celebrate"... "celebrate" his death and resurrection. The gift is beyond our comprehension. The mystery stretches our imagination. As I come to his table I pray, "Lord, I do believe; help my unbelief!"

The last word of the shepherd was "rejoice".

The last word of the woman was "rejoice".

The last word of the father was..."rejoice".