

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time **Gospel Word**
 Luke 15:1–32

This Sunday we hear three parables or stories that describe life in God's Kingdom. They also tell us something incredibly important about God. Jesus uses each of them to show what God is like. God is like a caring shepherd who cares so much about each individual sheep, he will momentarily forget about those that are safe, and seek out the one who is missing. God is also like a woman who really counts her pennies and when one is missing, she will do almost anything to find it. She treasures every single one of her possessions. There is a dramatic element in the telling of the first two parables that leads to the significance of the story of the merciful father and the Prodigal Son. God is indeed like the father who sees his wayward son in the distance, the same son who squandered half of the father's wealth and is now returning with his tail between his legs. He is contrite to be sure, but mostly he is ashamed. In the Jewish mindset of his hearers, justice would demand that the son be put back to work to earn what he foolishly and selfishly lost. But now comes the surprise. The father so loves his son that he sets aside the son's bad behavior and instead throws a magnificent party for his son and welcomes him back not as a servant but as a son. My, how much that father loved his son! My, how much God loves us!

Living the Word

Many people today still ask, "What is God really like?" Is God a tyrant; an indifferent bystander; a stranger, or maybe just an impersonal force that supports the natural laws of the universe? How will they know? Jesus always matched his words to his actions. If he only told stories without reaching out to the poor, healing the sick, and bringing life to people, fewer people would know what God was really like. Words with actions bring people to faith. People who ask the question today need to hear us tell the stories and do the actions.

It is true that the parables of the Gospel this week are wonderful to read and difficult to implement. All of them go beyond what might be called "common sense." But they are stories about God. Jesus' intention was not just to tell us what God was like but also to help us imagine what God's Kingdom looks like so we can help build it here. Since we are made in God's image, we too are called to generous love and forgiveness toward all our brothers and sisters. We are called to more than practical outcomes. We are called to risk forgiveness even when it makes people around us uncomfortable or angry. It is our responsibility to give people a hint of what God is like through our words and actions. It is not easy and we cannot do it alone but we can call on the strength of the presence of God within and around us.

One-line Prayer

Holy Spirit, help us to act in ways that give hints of what you are like to those around us. Amen.