

HOMILY for 24th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME - Year C

This Sunday's First Reading talks about Moses and how he led the people of God out of Egypt. As I reflected on that, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

God called down to Moses & said, "I've got good news & bad news. Which do you want first?"

Moses replied, "Most merciful Lord, please give me the good news first."

"Well, Moses, the good news is that I've chosen you to deliver my people from bondage," God answered. "I will force Pharaoh to release my children by causing years of pestilence in Egypt. There will be plagues of locusts and frogs and inconceivable devastation upon the land. Pharaoh's armies will chase you as you try to leave, but do not fear because I will part the waters of the Red Sea to aid you in your escape."

"And the bad news, Lord?" Moses inquired.

God answered, "You will have to prepare the environmental impact statement!"

As you just heard from the cute story, Moses was able to take the people of God out of Egypt in spite of the troubles along the way. This Sunday's First Reading continues that story for us. The Reading tells us how the people of God turned away from God and made a golden calf to worship instead. That act of betrayal disappointed God and made God angry. Moses had to ask God to forgive them and implore God as following, "Why, O Lord, should your wrath blaze up against your own people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with such great power and with so strong a hand? Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, & Israel; & how you swore to them by your own self, saying, 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the Stars in the sky; & all this land that I promised...' So, the Lord relented in the punishment He had threatened to inflict on His people." The people of God evidently had Moses to intercede for their sins and watch out for their benefits. Under his guidance, they were able to turn their lives around and come home to God.

But, that's not the only Bible story that talks about conversion & coming home to God. This Sunday's Gospel shares with us one of the classic stories of conversion as it tells us the story of the Prodigal Son. I'm sure we've all heard that story a lot of times before. In fact, it is the favorite story in the Bible for a deacon friend of mine; & he has asked me to use it at his funeral. Anyhow, the story is about the youngest son who left home to search for his life of freedom and pleasures. He took his father's resources for him and squandered everything on a life of pleasures and lewd conducts. He did not care about anyone else except himself & his own lifestyle. He was not concerned about his family at home & the well-being of its members. He indulged himself in that lifestyle blissfully for quite some time. The only thing that could stop him dead in his track was that he ran out of resources. He did not have any money left. He also had to face a famine like everyone else in the region. So, he had to go to a nearby farm & ask for a job. That must have been the first time he ever looked for a job. Perhaps that experience humbled himself & opened his eyes to the need for a personal conversion. That's how God woke him up & called him to turn his life around.

Here's how today's Gospel describes the desperation of the Prodigal Son & his personal conversion: "...After he had spent everything, a great famine broke out in that country & he was in dire need. So, he attached himself to one of the propertied class of the place, who sent him to his farm to take care of the pigs. He longed to fill his belly with the husks that were fodder

for the pigs, but no one made a move to give him anything. Coming to his senses at last, he said: 'How many hired hands at my father's place have more than enough to eat, while here I am starving! I will break away & return to my father, & say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God & against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me like one of your hired hands.' With that he set off for his father's house.'" I don't know if you could see how desperate the Prodigal Son must have felt in that Gospel passage before he saw the need for a personal conversion. That tells us that unless a person is desperate for God's mercy & help, one cannot truly experience a conversion. That is something for us to think about if we really want to embrace the experience of a personal conversion for ourselves. Of course, God would open His arms like a merciful & forgiving father to welcome us home any time. That is truly incomprehensible for us!

Now I want to turn to the amazing image of our God in human history & ask you to examine it with me. As you might know, God is mysterious to us along with God's way as last Sunday's First Reading told us. We don't know much about God even though the Bible has tried to share with us its knowledge & experiences of God. The second part of today's Gospel lets us know about a couple of characteristics of our God, namely, merciful & forgiving to the point that God is always ready & willing to welcome us home in spite of our countless & outrageous sins. Can you imagine that about our God? Furthermore, the first part of today's Gospel points out other characteristics of our God for us. One of those characteristics is that our God cares about each & every one of us. Our God would look for every member of God's family & take care of his/her needs. If you were a lost sheep & in trouble, God would leave the whole flock & go in search for you. Or, if you were one of the ten silver pieces that went missing, God would sweep the whole house & search for you. Then, God would invite the whole world to come & celebrate your return once God has found you. These particular characteristics of our God are completely different from what we've experienced in the world. For our world only cares about & functions on the rule of the majority. Or, if you were rich, famous, popular, or powerful, then it would care about you. It does not pay attention to a regular individual & his/her plight. The whole world still functions if one individual is hurt or missing. But, our God would look for that missing individual & take good care of a hurtful soul. That is the difference between our God & the world.

My dear brothers & sisters, the Bible tells us a lot about our God & the divine characteristics at work in our human history. It also shares with us countless stories of conversion, including the Story of the Prodigal Son in today's Gospel. It's nice to hear a story like that. But, it's much more meaningful & memorable if we'd experience a personal conversion ourselves. For that's how we could meet God in person right here in this life. So, let's find various ways to make that personal conversion happen to each one of us soon.