

Welcoming Sinners

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Today's readings point to us to human tendencies acting on our own lead us to slippery slopes of idolatry, ignorance, self-righteousness, self-indulgence, jealousy, anger, etc. Despite our human failures and lack of gratitude for God's providence and grace, God's love to us remains unconditional.

In the first reading, Moses pleads with the Lord on behalf of the Israelites, who went back to their old practice of idolatry when they were enslaved in Egypt. The English saying, "Old habits are hard to die" rings true in this situation of the Israelites, who in the desert sliding back to the habits they acquired from a dominant culture, Egypt. The Israelites are physically out of Egypt but culturally and spiritually have not fully liberated themselves.

Moses pleads with God on behalf of Israelites, liberated from slavery with wonders and miracles. Such intercession on behalf of people is typical for a prophet, who is in tune with God's way. We witness Abraham, who pleads on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, later centuries Hebrew prophets continued to plead on behalf of their people remind them "not to harden their hearts." A call for conversion and change of hearts from old habits, to free us from anything that negates God's grace in our life. For example, Prophet Isaiah delivers the message saying, "Come now, let us thing right says the Lord: Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; though the be crimson red, they may become white as wool" (Isa. 1:18). God's mercy is unconditional, welcoming sinners.

In today's Gospel precisely highlight the welcoming of the sinner, challenging the Pharisees' self-righteous approach as if their external acts of devotion and keeping statutes alone would gain them favor before God. Their statement, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Luke underlines three parables speaking to God's mercy and compassion to a single person to come back from his/her sins.

Jesus also challenges those who kept the law scrupulously. He tells them that they are as guilt as the public sinner because they create obstacles for the sinner to seek mercy or be jealous for those who have changed their lives to in sync with God's mystery of salvation. The conversion of St. Paul is a prime example. He was a Pharisee, who scrupulously kept the law and zealously protected it frow would be abusers to the point of dragging them to jail and even killing them. After his conversion, St. Paul says, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am the foremost. But for that reason, I was mercifully treated so that in me, as the foremost, Christ might display all his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in him for everlasting life."

In the Gospel reading, the rebellious son after hitting rock-bottom, he could not even access the food given to the pigs he was herding. For a Jew to descend even lower than the level of the pigs, is the most degrading condition. Yet even in that condition that unconditional love of his father was latent in his conscience and the Gospel says, "Coming to his sense he thought, ... I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, 'Father I have sinned against heaven and against you'." The merciful and loving father did even wait for his son to come to him, he went to receive and welcome him. He was filled with compassion and enveloped him with an embrace of his love. No matter in what state of human weakness or self-righteous virtue we are, God is unconditionally loving, and compassionately merciful to us for he has send his son to save the world not to condemn it. Jesus, whose name means savior, redeemer, healer, he came to save us from our sins and to heal us from our illness.