

Homily: 24th Sunday: Cycle C: 2016: Ex 32: 7-11, 13-14; Ps. 51; 1Tim 1: 12-17; Lk 15: 1-32

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!”

Remembering this is the key to spiritual awakening, spiritual conversion and development. Remembering this leads to a spirit of gratitude which is borne of divine forgiveness - a tangible experience of God’s mercy and love for us despite our sinfulness and infidelity. Truly this is the message of this special jubilee year of Divine Mercy. Remember God wants us to be His adopted Sons and Daughters in Christ, not slaves to sin and our fallen passions and desires as we see the Israelites doing in the 1st reading. God wants us to be holy as He is holy.

1. **Look at the life of St. Paul in this regard.** As he says today in the second reading, *“Christ Jesus 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 Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in Him for everlasting life.”* If Jesus was kind and forgiving to St. Paul as a persecutor and murderer of the Christians in an earlier part of His life, we should have **hope** as well, no matter what we have done! **Have we allowed the Lord to love and forgive us, especially in the Sacrament of Confession? Or are we holding on to past sins and hurts?**
2. **No sin is beyond God’s forgiveness however big:** *murder, abortion, adultery, sterilization, various forms of sexual immorality: pre-marital sexual activity, masturbation, contraception, homosexual acts, pornography, etc.(remember our sexuality is SACRED to the Lord as our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit - that is why we are called to such a high standard of moral behavior in this regard)), deliberately hiding mortal sins in Confession and/or lying to the priest in the Sacrament, receiving Holy Communion while being in the state of mortal sin, living with someone without being married, or getting married without the blessing of the Church, being serious neglectful or abusive of one’s spouse, parents or children, being a hateful and seriously selfish person for many years, stealing a large amount of money, abusing our body in a serious way with drugs and alcohol, trying to kill ourselves, messing around with black magic and the occult, being away from the Church, the Sacraments, and the life of prayer for a number of years, etc.* **God doesn’t hate such a person who falls into these sins, but longs for the person’s conversion and return to their true spiritual home:** the Catholic Church on earth which is the ark of salvation that leads us to our ultimate home in Heaven with the Most Blessed Trinity. **God longs for the sinner to return to the fold, not to die in his**

or her sins: this is what the parable of the Prodigal son is all about. And our Heavenly Father doesn't just passively wait for us to come back when we go astray, but actively seeks us out like a Good Shepherd seeking out the lost sheep. On the other hand, if we sin in big way at some point in our lives, the evil one, **the devil**, wants us to think God hates us, that He won't forgive us, that we have been too bad, desiring in his malice that we end up falling into the serious sin of **spiritual despair**: thinking we are "*beyond God's forgiveness.*" Or if that evil strategy doesn't work, the devil will try to get us to rationalize our infidelity to the Lord: "*I don't regret anything I have done,*" or another version of that rationalization is: "*God is all merciful so it doesn't mater what I do, He will forgive me anyhow.*" Both of these latter two rationalizations are different forms of the serious sin of **spiritual presumption**. Spiritual despair and spiritual presumption are the two sides of the coin of spiritual pride. In contrast, to be forgiven by the Lord we must acknowledge our guilt as the Psalmist says today (Psalm 51); **we need humility of heart to admit we are weak sinners.** We must be willing to turn back to our Heavenly Father, like **the younger brother** in the Gospel today, not to let the shame of our sins hold us back from asking God for forgiveness. And for us Catholics the normal way this occurs is in **the Sacrament of Confession**, a humbling (maybe that's why some avoid going too often) but healing Sacrament; it is truly **God's Sacrament of Mercy** for us: **a personal encounter with His loving heart.** Years ago many Catholics went to Confession (still do here in Bedford☺); now few do in most parishes, and in all honesty it has not lead to greater holiness in the Church and world. Please take advantage of this gift of God - go to Sacramental Confession on a frequent basis (monthly at least): to throw ourselves on God's mercy there - looking not just at **what** we have done wrong (**Confession is not supposed to be just a laundry list of sins!!!**), but **why** we have done such things and **how** it has hurt our relationship with God and other people. When in Confession, also humbly beseech the Lord for the opposite virtues to take root in your soul: *anger to gentleness, greed to generosity, gluttony to self-denial, lust to purity, pride to humility, sloth to diligence, envy to rejoicing in and for others good fortune, etc.* As a side note: if it's been a long time (years) since you have gone to Confession consider making an appointment with a priest of your choosing, so you can make a nice, thoughtful, diligent Confession without the worry of being rushed, like on a Saturday or another day when people are waiting in line to go. Also making a **General Confession** of your whole life up to this point, if you have never done so, is a VERY helpful spiritual tool to grow in holiness and get back on track with the Lord, especially if you ever got

yourself into a pattern of serious sin, at some point in your life, and need special spiritual healing in that regard or are making a big life change, like getting married.

3. **What about the older brother in the parable today?** What spiritual lesson can we learn from him? Maybe we are no longer the younger brother squandering our inheritance on a dissolute life of promiscuity and drunkenness, but maybe we have turned into the older brother: *hard-hearted, having faith but not love: e.g., questioning the sincerity of other's goodness and spiritual conversion (especially if they lived a very sinful life in the past)- instead of rejoicing that the Lord in His unfathomable Mercy has restored them to the Life of Grace; and finally serving the Lord, the Church and other people out of a sense of obligation and legalism, instead of out of self-giving love and gratitude from the depths of our hearts, for after all the Lord has forgiven us as well- over and over again - HAVE WE FORGOTTEN THAT ALONG THE WAY !* If this sad "older brother" dynamic has occurred in our hearts, we also need a conversion in a serious way, for serving the Lord is not to be a burden but a joy in the depths of our being, and is to lead to a humble life of self-giving love, not self-righteous pride. In this dynamic of the "older brother" there is also a need to throw ourselves on God's mercy and forgiveness, begging Him to forgive our hard-heartedness, our lack of love, our self-righteousness and our failure to rejoice in the good by focusing too much on the negative in life. Remember Jesus came into the world to save sinners (and what a price He paid- dying on the CROSS! - so that we could have access to the grace of forgiveness and salvation), but to be saved we have to admit WE ARE SINNERS in need of God's mercy, forgiveness, and redemption and to receive those magnificent gifts from God, we must treat others likewise. As we pray in the **Our Father**: *"Father, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."* **NEVER FORGET THAT!** Let us all today make a resolution to throw ourselves on **the Mercy of God daily in our prayers** and in the **Sacrament of Confession** on a frequent basis, and truly say together with the psalmist today (Ps 51), *"Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me. A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Cast me not out from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me. O Lord open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn."* Amen. God bless you.