

Homily – Lk. 15: 1-32
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time
10th September 2022

“Amazing Grace” is always listed among the favourite hymns of all time. It is an old one, going back to the 18th century. It was written by John Newton, who was on the sea from the time he was a little boy. When he was a young man, he became the captain of his own ship, a ship that brought African slaves to the colonies to work on the plantations. Back in England, between voyages, he once went to hear George Whitefield preach, and was converted. He realized the evil of his occupation, left it, and became a priest in the Church of England and served the rest of his life as the rector of a little church in a town called Olney. He wrote a number of hymns which were printed in a collection called the “Olney Hymns,” (a classic collection of hymns in the Church), and “Amazing Grace” was one of them. Over two hundred years old, this beautiful hymn is uncompromisingly Christian in its language, reflecting John Newton’s experience of being found. There he would say; “I once was lost, but now am found.” — Maybe that is the clue to its popularity, because it could be called the Christian understanding of our relationship with God. “God has found us”.

Now, today's readings remind us that God actively seeks out the lost, He wants their repentance, and rejoices when the lost are found. Yes, God is eager to be merciful toward us, not vengeful and punishing. He is always in search of His lost and straying children, as Jesus explains in the three parables of today's Gospel.

Well, Chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel that we heard today has been called "the Gospel within the Gospel," because it is the distilled essence of the Good News about the mercy of our forgiving Heavenly Father. The whole chapter is essentially a single parable, the "Parable of the Lost and Found," with three parable illustrations: the story of the lost sheep, the story of the lost coin and the major story of the lost son. These stories remind us that we have a God who welcomes sinners and forgives their sins whenever they return to Him with genuine contrition and resolution.

An old Jewish legend describes what happened when God created man. The legend says God took into counsel the Angels that stood about his throne. The Angel of Justice said; **'Create him not,** for if You do, he will commit all kinds of wickedness against his fellowmen; 'The Angel of Truth said, **'Create him not,** for he will be false and deceitful to his brother and even to You.' The Angel of Holiness stood and said; **'Create him**

not, for he will follow that which is impure in Your sight and dishonour You to Your Face.’ Then stepped forward the Angel of Mercy, God’s most beloved angel, and said; ‘**Create him**, Heavenly Father, for when he sins and turns from the path of right and truth and holiness, I will take him tenderly by the hand, and speak loving words to him and then lead him back to You.’

Well, we are what we are because of God’s mercy. As Scriptures would often remind us: “God’s mercy is greater than our sin”. Yes, His mercy is greater, richer, deeper, higher and wider than we could possibly imagine. And so, instead of wishing that the Stalins and the Hitlers of this world are cast into hell, we as true followers of Christ should be hoping and praying that they had a good sense to repent of their sins; instead of judging other people by our own sense of justice, we should be trying to adopt God’s sense of mercy; instead of justifying our own mistakes and cover our own errors, we should hold our hands up and confess the times we have gone astray from the right path; and instead of harbouring resentments over periods of years and allowing family arguments to fester into deep divisions we should be the ones who make the first move towards the healing of these wounds.

The renowned Theologian, Dr Karl Barth, was spending an evening within the intimate circle of friends. Curious to know more about the great theologian's thinking, one of those present asked him: 'What is the most profound thought that ever entered your mind?'. After a brief moment of reflection Dr Barth replied very simply: 'The most profound thought I have ever known is the simple truth: 'Jesus loves me, and this I know, for the Bible tells me so'.

Yes, God's love for each of us, even the most lost in our company, is vast and unqualified. Max Lucado writes: "If God had a refrigerator, your magnet picture would be on it. And if He had a wallet, your photo will be in it. Whenever you want to talk, He'll listen. Face it, friend, He's crazy about you".

God bless you all, **Amen.**