

Our Sunday Readings

EXODUS 32:7-11, 13-14
 PSALM 51:3-4, 12-13, 17, 19
 I TIMOTHY 1:12-17
 LUKE 15:1-32 or 15:1-10

The Lost Ones

EXODUS 32:7-11, 13-14

Reading closely

1. With whom is God angry? How does God refer to them?
2. What have the people done?
3. What is *the way I pointed out to them* (v.8)?
4. What does God say he'll do to the people?
5. What does God say he'll do for Moses?
6. How does Moses persuade God not to destroy the Israelites?
7. What might Moses be thinking and feeling during all of this?
8. If the people heard God's words to Moses, what might they say?

Living the word

9. What do you think of the way God is portrayed here?
10. When have you *turned aside from the way God pointed out to you*?

THE FIRST READING

While Moses is away...

God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, provided them with food and water in the Sinai desert, and made a covenant with them. The Israelites, in turn, freely chose to enter into this

covenant and to worship the LORD (Yahweh) alone. At this point in the story, Moses has gone back up Mount Sinai to receive more commandments from God.

Moses is gone for so long the Israelites think he's gone for good. Since Moses was the only person through whom the people were communicating with God, they ask Moses' brother to make something that represents God. The calf, or young bull, represents the strength of the LORD, who proved far more powerful than the gods of Egypt.

A humble intercessor

The Israelites were forbidden from making images of God because worship of the image could easily replace worship of the true God. God is so angry he refers to the Israelites as *Moses' people* and says that *Moses freed them*. After disowning them God says he will destroy them and start over with Moses. Moses, however, refuses this chance to become the father of a new people and instead begs God to forgive these wayward descendants of Abraham.

LUKE 15:1-32

Reading closely

1. How does the man treat the lost sheep?
2. To what lengths does the woman go to find her coin?
3. What does the man do after finding what was lost? What does the woman do?
4. How does the younger son seem to treat his father?
5. What does the younger son do after he leaves?
6. What do you think the younger son is thinking and feeling as he returns to his father?
7. How would you have responded to the younger son's return?
8. What is the older son doing during all of this?
9. How does the older son react?
10. What does the older son seem to feel toward his brother? toward his father?
11. In what ways might each of the people in these three parables have failed?

Living the word

12. How do these parables challenge you?
13. How do these parables help you examine your relationships with others?
14. What, if anything, should you do now?

THE GOSPEL READING

Who's missing?

Jesus has been interacting with all kinds of people regardless of their social status. Righteous Jews like the Pharisees complain that sinners should repent before being counted among God's people.

Jesus emphasizes that God's priority is to welcome sinners rather than make sure they're punished for their sins. Neither sheep nor coins are capable of repentance, but they can be lost. These parables invite us to ask ourselves if we're reaching out to people who might otherwise slip away, forgotten.

Self-indulgence

It was unusual for a father to divide his property before his death. The father probably grieved over his younger son's request and departure. The son's actions might also have dishonored his father, but the father could have refused. Instead, he seems to indulge his younger son.

Preparing an act of contrition

When famine hits, the younger son tends pigs, animals that Jews were supposed to keep away from. The pigs have it better than he does. We hear the son formulate a plan for returning to his father. We don't know if he really has repented or if he's hoping that his father will take him back no matter what.

A prodigal reception

The father responds with overwhelming love, just as the younger son hoped. He rushes to his son and restores his place in the family by giving him a ring with the family seal on it and dressing him in fine clothes. He orders that a calf that was being reserved for a special occasion be prepared.

The other lost son

Having regained one son, the father discovers he has lost another. No one has bothered to tell the older son what's happening. Just as the father went out to welcome the younger son, he must now go out to the older one. This son resents his father's merciful treatment of his brother and the way he himself has been taken for granted. The parable ends here. We're left asking ourselves what we would say and do next.

For more insights into this parable, see Amy-Jill Levine's Short Stories by Jesus.

PRAYER

adapted from a prayer by Joyce Rupp

So much of me gets lost, God.
 I run off in other directions
 and lose my vision of you and your kingdom.
 I lose sight of my hopes.
 I forget all your promises.
 I get lost in problems and run around in
 selfishness.
 You are before me, watching.
 You are behind me, calling.
 You are beside me, loving.
 Good Shepherd, come in search of me.
 Place me on your shoulders, and bring me home.
 Amen.