

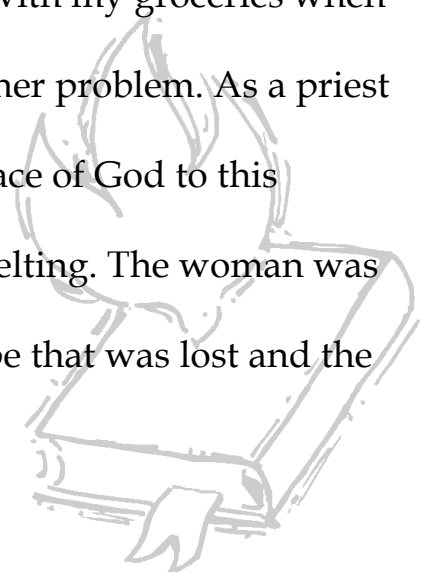
**Homily**  
**24<sup>th</sup> Sunday OT - C**  
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski  
September 14-15, 2019

Ex 32: 7-11, 13-14  
Ps 51: 3-4, 12-13, 17, 19  
1 Tm 1: 12-17  
Lk 15: 1-32

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One of the most difficult phrases I have to encounter in life is the grieving person who pulls me aside on the street and tells me that “we have to talk.” I could be buying gasoline or standing in the line to see a movie when someone who recognizes me wishes to speak about some trial in their life or a theological issue that they wish to discuss. Just last week, I was taking my dog for a walk, speaking with a believer about the difference between *con-substantiation* and *trans-substantiation*. A word to the wise: Fr. Pete does not walk and chew gum well at the same time.

A couple weeks back, I was in a parking lot with my groceries when a very distraught woman approached me with her problem. As a priest and as a Christian, I felt the need to offer the grace of God to this woman, even as the ice cream in the bag was melting. The woman was talking about the troubles in her family, the hope that was lost and the



need to find God during her time of despair. It is always when I listen to these stories that I realize the ice cream in my bag is not really that important, for a person like this woman was seeking the grace of God in her life and it was an honor for me to be placed in a position to help her.

As I was reflecting on this weekend's readings, I was thinking about the story of this woman and how she very much relates to the message of our scriptures today. I thought to myself that at one point or another in our lives, we all get into situations where we ask ourselves, "Why me, God?" or "Where is the justice in this world?" I started to reflect on the numerous times I have read in our history books about peoples or societies who have struggled with very similar problems and how they turn to God in their time of grief.

The same emotions that the people evoke are the same ones we found in about a third of the Responsorial Psalms we pray at Mass. These psalms from the Old Testament, called "Lamentation Psalms," often begin with this cry for help to God. For me, in my times of grief, I often turn to Psalm 22, the great psalm used by Christ during his suffering on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me, far from my

prayer, from the words of my cry?" The psalm we are given at today's Mass, Psalm 51 or the *Miserere Psalm*, is the one of the most quoted psalms in the life of the priest, prayed every Friday morning during our morning prayers: "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 cleanse me of my sin."

There are so many themes on which we can focus from the treasure of today's gospel. The theme could be focused on the example of the father's forgiveness and the need to follow that example. The theme could be focused on the second son in this story, who has been faithful to the father's teachings and yet becomes jealous that the sinful brother has been welcomed in a greater way than he has ever experienced. Inspired, though, by the struggles of this woman, I turn back to that Prodigal Son, who in his time of grief, turns back to his father and asks for forgiveness. The prayer to his father, a prayer of forgiveness, is the key to our salvation, for all of us in one way or another follow the example of this sinful child. We are all sinners, each one of us, we all get mad at God at one time or another for the troubles we encounter in this

world. Some of us might use God's name in vain to express our displeasure for the trials of this world, abandoning the call to love one another in favor of a life of damnation.

I connected the words of our Prodigal Son today with the words of Psalm 51, the mercy prayer that is offered by the penitent as a form of contrition to God for the life of sin that has been lived. And though we acknowledge our sinfulness at the beginning of this psalm, at the passage's end (as is the case with most of the Lamentation Psalms), we focus on the grace of God that helps the sinner to convert their ways and turn to the life of love that God wishes us to live in the first place.

Because Psalm 51 is frequently used in the life of religious prayer, various popes have spoken about the powerful grace that this particular psalm evokes. I noticed that our last two Holy Fathers prior to Pope Francis devoted months of their Wednesday papal audience's sessions to the reflection of the psalms in general and the charism of grace that is revealed through the recitation of all the psalms.

Specifically concerning Psalm 51, St. Pope St. John Paul II reiterated the theme of forgiveness that is the subject of today's homily. The Holy Father proclaimed the following:

The message of hope of the *Miserere* which the Psalter puts on the lips of David, a converted sinner, is this: God can "blot out, wash and cleanse" the sin confessed with a contrite heart (cf. Ps 51[50]: 2-3). The Lord says, through the voice of Isaiah, even if "your sins are scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool" (Is 1: 18) ... the most pleasing sacrifice that rises to the Lord like a fragrance, a pleasant odour (cf. Gn 8: 21), is not the holocaust of bulls and lambs, but rather of "the broken and contrite heart" (Ps 51[50]: 19).

El mensaje de esperanza del *Miserere*, que el Salterio pone en labios de David, pecador convertido, es este: Dios puede "borrar, lavar y limpiar" la culpa confesada con corazón contrito (cf. *Sal* 50, 2-3). Dice el Señor por boca de Isaías: "Aunque fueren vuestros pecados como la grana, como la nieve blanquearán. Y aunque fueren rojos como la púrpura, como la lana quedarán" (*Is* 1, 18) ... el sacrificio más agradable que sube al Señor como perfume y suave fragancia (cf. *Gn* 8, 21) no es el holocausto de novillos y corderos, sino, más bien, el "corazón quebrantado y humillado" (*Sal* 50, 19).

In this light, my private joke is that no one at the parish sins on the scheduled Saturdays we offer the sacrament but everyone sins on every other day of the week when I am pulled aside to hear someone's confession. I have come to find out, at this particular Church, that

Saturday confessions are usually lonely places for the priest confessor but at the times most inconvenient to me that great moments of grace take place with those whose lives are in need of God's mercy. And in this community, mercy can be found while walking the dog, while eating at the local dives where I hang out with friends and even in the parking lots when my ice cream begins to melt. So often the faithful come to the rectory seeking God's mercy and I get the honor and privilege of offering God's love to those so much in need of seeking this divine presence in their life. It is at these moments that I very much feel blessed to be a priest, that I feel blessed that God has chosen me as a vessel through whom he wishes to offer his love.

The fact is that when we sin, we all become the lost sheep of Israel and that eventually in our lives we need to come to grips with the lives we lead and the manner in which we should reform them. When we come to that point, when we choose to turn to the Lord with this contrite spirit, we become "found" again, which provides a great moment of celebration for the angels and saints in heaven. Let us continue to be led by the Lord. Let us draw in the lost flock that have lost their way. Let us

continue to serve and love and welcome the people that we meet to this table of sacrifice, where the stranger and the sinner, the sick and the struggling are most welcome to join us in our feast. This is our prayer.