

Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent

Gospel text (Mt 18:12-14): Jesus said to his disciples, “What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost.”

“It is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost”

Fr. Damien LIN Yuanheng
(Singapore, Singapore)

Today, Jesus challenges us: “What do you think of this?” (Mt 18:12): what kind of mercy do you practice? Perhaps, we, “practicing Catholics”, having drunk copiously of God's mercy in his sacraments, could come to a point to think that we are already justified in the eyes of God. We run the danger of unconsciously becoming the Pharisee who slights the tax-collector (cf. Lk 18:9-14). Though we might not speak it aloud, we might think that we are already blameless before God. Some symptoms of this pharisaical pride taking root could be impatience before the defects of others; or thinking we are already beyond reproach.

The disobedient prophet Jonah, a Jew, was adamant when God showed pity on the Assyrian city of Nineveh. Yahweh reproached Jonah's intolerance (cf. Jon 4:10-11). His human outlook set a limit to divine mercy. Do we also set a limit to God's mercy? We too have to heed Jesus' lesson: “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36). In all likelihood, we still have a long way to go to imitate God's mercy.

How should we understand the mercy of our heavenly Father? Pope Francis said that “God does not pardon with a decree but with an embrace.” God's embrace of each one of us is called ‘Jesus Christ’. Christ manifests God's fatherly mercy. In John chapter four, Christ did not make light of the sins of the Samaritan woman. Instead, God's mercy heals by helping the Samaritan woman come face to face with the full reality of her sin. God's mercy is fully consistent with truth. Mercy is not an

excuse to cut corners. Yet, Jesus must have elicited her repentance with so much tenderness that the adulterous woman felt herself “wounded by love” (cf. Jn 8,3-11). We too have to learn how to help others come face to face with their mistakes without shaming them, with great respect for them as fellow brothers in Christ, and with tenderness. In our case, also with humility, knowing that we ourselves are “vessels of clay”.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“Where do you feed, good Shepherd, you who take the entire flock upon your shoulders?. Show me the verdant place. Lead me to the nourishing grass. Call me by name that I may hear your voice, I who am your sheep.” (St Gregory of Nyssa)

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“A person is comforted when he feels the Lord’s mercy and forgiveness. The joy of the Church is to ‘give birth’, to come out of herself in order to give life, to go out in search of those sheep who are lost.” (Pope Francis)

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“When he celebrates the sacrament of Penance, the priest is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, of the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return, and of the just and impartial judge whose judgment is both just and merciful. The priest is the sign and the instrument of God's merciful love for the sinner.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, N° 1465)

Other comments

“In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost.”

Fr. Joaquim MONRÓS i Guitart
(Tarragona, Spain)

Today, Jesus makes it known that God wants all men to be saved and “it is not the

will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost.” (Mt 18:14). With the parable of the shepherd who looks for the sheep that has gotten lost, He presents us with a figure that deeply moved the first Christians. In the title page of the Catechism of the Catholic Church we find, engraved, the figure of Jesus the Good Shepherd who as early as in the catacombs of Rome is present among the first images of the Lord.

God's desire for our salvation is so strong that, from the uttering of these words, up to His unconditional sacrifice of the Cross, it is Christ who is looking for us so that we can —with complete freedom— come back to His friendship. We Christians need to share this same desire: that all be saved and get to know the Truth! As Josemaria Escrivá liked to say, “we are all sheep and shepherd”. There are people —our husband or wife, our children, relatives and friends, etc.— for whom we may be the only chance they have of recovering the happiness of faith and a life of grace.

We can always leave aside ninety-nine percent of the things we are doing, to pray for and help that person whom we have near, that we love and that we know is missing something in their soul.

With our prayer and mortification, and with our loving faith, they can achieve the grace of conversion, just as Saint Monica got her son Augustine to become the “first modern man”, one who knows how to explain in *The Confessions* the way in which grace acted in the conversion that would lead to his sanctity.

We ask the Mother of the Good Shepherd for the joy of many conversions.