

Opening the Word: We're called to seek with the urgency of God



Imagine that you're on a trip abroad. You arrive at the airport and reach into your bag for your passport, knowing that you'll need it to arrive home. It's not there. You look in another pocket; also not there. You panic, looking through every pocket of your bag. Finally, you remember that you put your passport in your coat, finding it just in time to board the airplane for home.

When we lose something important, we begin to search for it with urgency. In the end, a passport is just a passport, replaceable through a complicated visit to an embassy. But what parent has not experienced overwhelming urgency when they can't find their child in a crowd? These losses shake us to the core.

The Scriptures describe a God who responds urgently in response to potential losses. God has entered a covenant with Israel, choosing them among all the nations. This God led Israel through the sea dry-shod, saving them from slavery at the hands of the Egyptians.

And yet, Israel is lost. While Moses is receiving the Law from God, they have worshipped a golden calf. They have turned away from the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob.

God suggests to Moses that God can start again with just him. Get rid of this people, this stiff-necked nation.

But Moses intervenes, reminding God that such losses are not acceptable. For the people who would be left behind are not just any nation, but the one chosen by God. How could God

abandon his beloved?

Moses recognizes something that Israel doesn't yet. They are God's beloved, chosen from the beginning. God doesn't want to lose, and will respond with urgency. Much of the Old Testament deals with this urgent response of a God who loves, even when it hurts.

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Sept. 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

Jesus' three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son take up this Old Testament narrative, expanding it to all the nations. The Pharisees are grumbling. Jesus dines with sinners. He meets with tax collectors. What could he be doing?

Jesus responds with these well-known parables. What shepherd wouldn't leave the 99 to search for one? What person wouldn't throw a party after finding a single coin in a home? What father wouldn't empty himself, running to his son, sharing everything with a nonetheless bitter older son?

Our answer should be a rousing, "None!" Shepherds don't abandon a whole flock to find one sheep. People don't spend money after finding a single coin in their dusty home. Fathers who are abandoned by their ingrate children shouldn't show mercy.

But God's urgency is different than our own. Happily for our sake, God is not enacting vendettas against ingrate men and women.

God searches. God seeks. God invites men and women back into the covenant, the new covenant of love unto the end.

In 2015-16, Pope Francis called a Jubilee Year of Mercy. The

entire Church was to reflect on divine mercy, God's heartfelt movement of love toward humanity revealed in Jesus Christ.

This call to mercy was not the act of a progressive pope seeking to ignore the language of sin.

Rather, it was a reminder to the entire Church of the urgency of God. God pursues every man and every woman unto the end. God doesn't give up.

Nor should the Church.

Like Moses, we should intervene for every person lost in the shadows of darkness and death. If we are to be Christ's body, then our job is to seek with urgency.

The urgency of God.

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