

HOMILY ~ 24th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME SEPTEMBER 10-11, 2022

There was an 86 year old man named Anthony and his 85 year old wife, Viola, who lived in New Jersey. They got in the car to go to the store, but Anthony took a wrong turn and they got lost. He drove and drove but he could not find his way. He drove 800 miles and had to stop for gas twice, but he would not ask for directions. They finally found their way home after over 24 hours, and this is how. Anthony got in an accident, and the police helped him find his way home. Anthony knew that he was lost, but did he want to be found? I think he wanted to avoid asking for directions more than he wanted to get home. Jesus tells us three parables in the Gospel Reading today, and they are all about different aspects of getting lost and being found. First of all, I want to point out that Jesus was addressing these parables to the Scribes and the Pharisees because they were complaining that Jesus was welcoming sinners and eating with them. I think Jesus is happy with our efforts here at St. Edith to welcome everyone because that is what Jesus did. In the first parable, it is a sheep that is lost and the shepherd leaves the 99 to find it. I do not think the sheep knew it was lost. It was not intentional, it just wandered off. Sheep are very vulnerable when they are alone because they cannot protect themselves from predators. Left alone, they will likely die. We wander off sometimes. We break our connection with the Church, not because we were hurt by someone, or had a major disagreement with the Church or anything like that, we sometimes just wander off. I think that is what happened to a number of people during COVID. We did not have public Masses for a while, they we were streaming for a while and now we are just in the habit of doing something else on Sunday morning. We also lost our connections with people in our Parish Family. We will be ok for a while, but eventually we will have some challenges in our lives and will need God. I hope that people will not feel so disconnected from God and the community that they do not know where to turn. I think we need to encourage each other to come back and reconnect before they have these challenges. Jesus is continuing to search for them. We need to search as well. In the second parable, a woman is looking for a lost coin and searches endlessly until she finds it. Scripture scholars tell us that the coin was likely worth about a penny. How long would you search for a penny? Sometimes we see ourselves as small and insignificant, like we are not valuable to Jesus. Jesus loves each of us unconditionally. We are all God's favorite, and he will never give up searching for us and calling us back.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, there are two people who are lost. The younger son chose to reject his family and their family values. He thought he knew a better way to live. He was wrong. He knew he was lost and wanted to be found. He did not know if his father would welcome him back, but that is exactly what the father did. Jesus does the same thing. He does not care how we got lost, he just wants to forgive us and welcome us back. Did you ever do something that you thought was unforgivable? No such thing with Jesus. Then we have the older son. He was lost through no fault of his own. His brother disgraced and rejected him and left him to do all of the work. We can hardly blame him for being angry. Now his brother is back, and he is mad at his father for welcoming him home. He is jealous of his brother because of the celebration that the father is giving for his return. He wants a celebration as well. He wants his father's love, and he had it all the time. Does he want to be found? His father wants to find him, to love him as well, but he must forgive his brother and reconcile with his father. What he needs to be found is right there, but will he be able to choose it?

And let's get back to our friend, Anthony. He knew he was lost and the means to being found was right there; but he could not reach out. I wonder if he would still be driving around if he had not gotten into the accident that forced him to be found. Sometimes the solution to our problems is right there, but we just cannot see it or resist choosing it. God is always waiting to find us. I came across the following quote by Swiss priest and theologian, Hans Kung. This is what he said about Jesus: *"The God he reveals is one who identifies with us, our needs and hopes, who doesn't demand but lifts, who doesn't wound but heals, who forgives not condemns, who liberates rather than punishes."* Never forget that.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim