



National Committee for Professional Standards

**Child Protection Sunday – 11th September 2016
Twenty-fourth Sunday of the Year**

Exod 32:7-11, 13 – 14

Ps 51:3 -4, 12 – 13. 17,19

1Tim 1:12 – 17

Luke 15: 1 – 32 Parables of the lost sheep, coin and son

Homily Notes

Children sexually, physically and psychologically abused; children in detention centres; children who are homeless; children who are asylum seekers; children who live in settings of domestic violence; children living in poverty and poor health; children who need to leave home because of sexual orientation. *'Where is your brother? Where is your sister?'*

Today's gospel is the Gospel in miniature. *Being lost is the abiding theme today:* The lost sheep, a lost coin, and a 'lost' son. All a significant loss for those involved. It is not possible to distinguish from the readings between the sinner and the righteous person. There is one responsibility amongst all in a strong community. Find the one who is lost. This might include the really lost: religious leaders who fail to understand Jesus' message; who fail to see as Jesus does; who cannot respond with love and mercy as he does. Those who came to Jesus and listened to him knew they were accepted despite the fact that their human dignity was trashed by family, and the religious and social system.

The gospel invites us today to cherish the small acts and intimacies of God. Jesus tells us that small things are important to God and will not allow them to be lost. Like anything that is lost, it takes on an importance precisely because it is lost. The lost coin and lost lamb and indeed the lost son belong to a litany of small things that God will not let go of. The value of the lamb is as one that is part of the herd. The value of the lost son lay in the fact that he belongs to a family. This is where the heart and vision of God abide. This must have been so in the heart and vision of those hearing Jesus as well.

When we reflect on child protection we need also reflect on the violence that exists in relation to children, and anyone else. Violence, wherever it exists, is an act of dehumanization and de-sanctification. Abuse and violation of children, women and men is always a failure to recognise the sanctity of the 'other'. To refuse to forgive, to refuse to listen, to refuse to be reconciled, to refuse to protect, all are acts of violence. It is a diminishment of God's image.



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The 'bottom line' should be the creation of a world of love and caring, and that the best way to prevent these kinds of acts is to turn ourselves into a strong society in which social justice, love and compassion are prevalent and violence becomes a distant memory. The God we see imaged by Jesus wants to embrace all. May we realise this is our call. We are interconnected and called to share compassion and peace.

The question is will the lost son be able to return home? Will the lost sheep be found? Will the lost coin be found? It depends. Some would say that it requires a 'mother' in the house who will work on the 'father' to accept the son back.' In a patriarchal culture, the son would have been declared a disgrace and no longer part of the family. The father in the gospel is different - like a mother - watches, waits and runs to meet the one who was lost as s/he appears on the horizon. This turns patriarchal images of God on its head.

We are invited to see through different lens. How do we see ourselves and others? 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' Jesus acts out for us how he saw God and how we might see God. Like God, Jesus receives "trashy" people and eats with them': the lost; the rejected; the not listened to; the disregarded; the excommunicated; the people who had violated the Law; the people excluded from synagogue or temple, e.g., con-artists, adulterers, outcasts, the poor who did not keep religion's fancy rules or make the required offerings.

Jesus' gentle story ends with the unsettling demands of God's reign that justify association with the poor, the marginalised and the sinners. Jesus associates with such rejected people. ***Who is lost?*** God is like the heart-broken parent waiting and patiently looking out for the 'wayward' child as Terry Hicks did when his son David was held at Guantanamo Bay.

Who is lost? We are supposed to be in the business of the lost? What lens are we using? We are at risk of being at odds with Jesus' teaching. Who is lost?

There is not just ignorance, but ***a willed ignorance*** regarding the abuse of children in the past; regarding asylum seekers. We do not want to know their stories. To avoid listening and responding we exaggerate falsehoods about them. We contribute to their dehumanisation. Each act against the dignity of the child, of the asylum seeker, of the mentally ill person in our midst, the homeless person or the addicted person is a failure to recognise the sanctity of the 'other'. The biblical ideal is that every human life [all life] is sacred.... The 'bottom line' should be the creation of a world of love and caring, and that the best way to prevent these kinds of acts is not to turn ourselves into a society in which social justice, love and compassion become only a distant memory. We are interconnected and called to share compassion and peace.

We have love to share; to experience ourselves as sisters and brothers. We cannot do it by holding up divisive systems and structures where people are set over others or are categorised by labels and stereotypes. It is who we are in God's heart that needs a focus adjustment.