

The Homily by Fr Mangaliso Mdhlela, St Stephen's, Tokoza.

Homily: the merciful Lord

Romans 6:19ff; Luke 15:11ff

"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him." - Romans 5: 8

In the name + of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

The Greek word metanoia is profound and beautiful in its meaning. It calls humanity to experience a metanoia moment, a moment of reflection that may lead us to the renouncement of all that is evil we often call sin; and to experience 180° turn in life, so that in the final analysis, we are able to face the opposite direction, towards the direction of goodness with joy and contentment; the path of our loving Good Shepherd, of whom we are all about this Holy Mass this morning.

The Gospel passage of St Luke which we have proclaimed this morning is, to use a strange word, delectable. It ought to be music to those who hear it; it is mouth-watering and delicious, if you like, ready to give us joy and happiness as we travel in this path to God and the Kingdom.

The Gospel passage puts three parables alongside each other, which all point to the same thing - the joyfulness of God as expressed in forgiveness and mercy.

The legal scholar of the ancient world, a Roman-Dutch jurist, Voet, once observed. And I briefly quote him: "Among the faults of judges which are most harmful are hastiness, the striving after severity and misplaced pity...and that we should be like the laws. The laws approach punishment not in a spirit of anger but one of equity."

We have to think of these words to contextualise for ourselves how Jesus was seen by the Scribes and Pharisees of his day and time.

This is what they say of Jesus: "This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them."

By their words, that is, the Pharisees and Scribes, we can see that they were not at home with sinners, whom they believed ought to be kept at bay, at arms length, and so believed in their heart of hearts that sinners deserved no love and mercy and should be outrightly condemned. Show them no mercy, they thought. That tendency still persists to this day.

In his response, Jesus uses, to ward off their criticism, the parable of the Lost Sheep, which we have heard being proclaimed to you two weeks ago, and which I would be surprised if you were not familiar with!

"Does he not leave the ninety-nine sheep in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"

The two other parables, the parable of the Lost Coin, and the parable of Lost Son, or the Prodigal Son, (our Gospel today) convey the same message.

Prodigality is known in legal academic circles and is described as referring to persons with normal mental ability who squander their assets in an irresponsible and reckless way due to some defect in their power of judgment.

Here in the Gospel passage, we encounter such a character, the Prodigal Son. Father, he says, can I please have a share of my estate?

Of course, he does what all prodigal children do. He sets off to a faraway place and where, recklessly and with great abandon, day by day squanders his inheritance, or estate. The rest of the story, as they say, is history, and you also know he got into some serious financial difficulties for his reckless living, paying the price, as it were.

We have also seen a woman shining a lamp and sweeping her house to find one lost coin of the ten she had. Just this one coin, I have to find, she must have said to herself.

Metanoia is about conversion, which is an act that brings joy and happiness when there is acceptance by us of those we may perceive, in our judgment, to be unworthy of anything, and even worthy of forgiveness.

"My son," the Father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

Friends, this nothing but the miracle of the Resurrection.

In the + Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen