

24th Sunday per Annum - C
Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14;
I Timothy 1:12-17;
Luke 15:1-10
Little Flower - 9/11/16

My Brothers and Sisters,

All three readings today are about sin and God's mercy.

When we think about the kinds of sins, most of us think of original sin and personal sin. According to Pope John Paul II, "As a result of original sin human beings are born in a state of hereditary moral weakness."¹ Discussing personal sin, he talked about the social dimension of personal sin. Every sin we commit also affects others. However, Pope John Paul II also talked about a third kind of sin, the sin of the world. He defined it "as a kind of 'infection' which is spread from human hearts into the environments in which they live and into the structures which support and condition their existence."

In today's second reading, Paul confesses to Timothy that he is foremost among sinners because he was once a blasphemer, a persecutor, and arrogant. If human wisdom consists of knowing what we do not know, Paul became a blasphemer and a persecutor because of his arrogance. This is why pride is often called the deadliest of the deadly sins. However, he states twice that he was mercifully treated by Jesus. He was able to proclaim that "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*" only because of his personal experience of sin and God's mercy.

Today's reading from Exodus, on the other hand, provides an example of the sin of the world. The golden calf was not just the sin of individuals, but the sin of the community. God described them as a "stiff-necked people." The community was infected by sin. However, when God was ready to destroy the people, Moses asked God to be merciful to them, and God was merciful.

Today is 9/11. Fifteen years ago today, there were four terrorist attacks on the United States that killed almost 3000 people and injured over 6,000 others. It was also the deadliest day for firefighters and law enforcement officers in our history. The firefighters and police were the heroes of that day. Today we want to remember all of those who lost their lives or were injured that day as well as their families and loved ones.

Fifteen years later law enforcement officers throughout the country are under constant criticism and even physical attack because of the misdeeds of some police officers. We seem to have lost our respect for those women and men who put their lives on the line every time they go to work to protect us. We need to re-find that respect and teach our children to respect police officers and firefighters.

I would suggest that 9/11 itself, the current verbal and physical attacks on police officers, the misdeeds of some police officers, and the lack of respect for police officers and firefighters are not just examples of personal sin but of the sin of the world, an infection. Therefore, like Moses, we all need to ask for God's mercy on our world today, to ask God for the gift of healing to break down the walls, the barriers, and the divisions that separate people from one another.

My brothers and sisters, the parables in the 15th chapter of Luke's Gospel are all parables of God's mercy. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep to search for the one who is lost. The woman who lost one of her ten coins does not stop searching until she has found it. God's mercy is so great that he never gives up on us or on anyone else. God's love, God's mercy, is the one constant in our lives and in our world. As Jesus said in John's Gospel, "*I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world*" [16:33].

¹Pope John Paul II, "The sin of man and the 'sin of the world': Catechesis by Pope John Paul II on Jesus Christ," General Audience, Wednesday, 5 November 1986, <http://totus2us.com/teaching/jpii-catechesis-on-jesus-christ/the-sin-of-man-and-the-sin-of-the-world/>, §1. The quotation at the end of the paragraph is from §7.