

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation:

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14

Psalms 51:3-4, 12-13, 17, 19

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Luke 15:1-32 [or 15:1-10]

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading that appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word In Liturgy

The incident of worship of the golden calf, which we hear about in today's first reading, makes a crucial theological point in the unfolding of the book of Exodus: The relationship of the people with God is characterized at its heart by rebellion on the people's part, and forgiveness on the part of God. The people turn to an idol to replace God even before Moses comes down from the mountaintop! Their resistance to God is presented as something patent, reflexive; they are "a stiff-necked people." But through the intercession of Moses, and remembering the covenant with the patriarchs, God relents and forgives even this flagrant violation of their relationship.

Setting the context for today's gospel is the complaint by some of the religious leaders that Jesus welcomes sinners and—making the scandal complete—eats with them. The short form contains two parables: the lost sheep and the lost coin. The long form also includes the parable of the prodigal son, which was read on the fourth Sunday of Lent. All three illustrate God's solicitude in searching for sinners, and the shared joy that accompanies their return to safety (their complete reconciliation to God). But the parable of the prodigal son most of all penetrates the leaders' objection, by its sensitive and incisive treatment of the elder brother. Ideally, therefore, the long form of the gospel should be read, for the greater depth the third parable introduces.

The lost sheep and the lost coin are parallel stories (the second unique to Luke): one image



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of God is male (the shepherd), the other female (the woman whose coin is lost). In both, great care is taken to find what is lost. The tenderness of the shepherd, expressed in the detail of taking the sheep on his shoulders, further indicates the loving nature of the search. Each parable concludes with a joyful communal celebration. The celebration is not an afterthought, but an integral part of the lesson of the parables. The reconciliation of the lost is naturally portrayed not as an exercise of grim duty, but as something that delights the heart of God—and can be expected to delight the friends of God as well. This theme is carried through the parable of the prodigal son as well, which, in rich detail, elaborates all of these features.

Yet this last parable brings a new twist, by probing the reaction of the elder brother. When the elder brother's jealousy keeps him away from the feast, the father likewise goes out to him, and in the ensuing conversation, the depth of the elder son's alienation is revealed. The elder son is alienated from his brother: he calls him not "my brother" but "that son of yours" (a point on which the father gently corrects him); he exaggerates the younger son's crimes, inventing "loose women" that were never mentioned before; and most poignant of all, he reveals that he is alienated from his father. "All these years I slaved for you," he says. Son though he was, sharing in all that his father has, nevertheless in his heart he felt himself to be a slave. The religious leaders, seeing sinners enter the kingdom ahead of those who have kept the law, are plainly depicted in this character of the elder brother. The father's response is instructive. He is generous with the elder, but will not abandon the younger. All are invited to the feast.

The church continues to welcome and rejoice over the reconciliation of sinners, the lost, and the alienated. The focus of today's catechesis may therefore be on the church's outreach, and its continual mission to welcome the alienated home to the feast of God's love.

Catholic Doctrine

The Church's Ministry of Reconciliation

The Church's ministry of reconciliation is basic to its life, given that the church's founder, Jesus, came to restore us to God the Father and thus engaged in a ministry of reconciliation. He is imagined as the physician who provides the healing necessary for us to be made right with God. Jesus healed those who were not only bodily sick but also who were sick spiritually (CCC 1503). In the incarnation of Jesus, the initiative of divine love, seeks out every single human being, to bring us back and welcome us to our true home with God (CCC 605).

This mission of Jesus continues in the church, whom the early Fathers envisioned as the safe



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boat by which we navigate this unsafe world and a type of Noah's Ark which saves us. Those who are scattered, those who are far off, those who are led astray are invited back to the church and rediscover unity and salvation (CCC 845).

This way of imaging our ecclesial mission is not limited to the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, but rather, encompasses an attitude, an outlook, and the entire range of activities by which the People of God minister to those who are hurting, alienated and marginalized, within and outside the Catholic Church. There are many different forms of alienation and bitterness, within families, between groups and races, between whole peoples. Individuals are alienated from the Church itself. Efforts to heal, to bring together, to reconcile properly belong to the Church whose founder preached the parable of the prodigal son. Thus, we believe that "The whole Church, as a priestly people, acts in different ways in the work of reconciliation which has been entrusted to it by the Lord." (Rite of Penance, n 8)

