

IX Trinity 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

1 Cor. 10.1-13 St. Luke 15.11-32

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Our friend, Saint Paul, reminds us Christians can expect to be tested just like everyone else on Earth. The Bible clearly states hardships and temptations are part of life for all people. Paul also reminds us God always keeps his promise. He will not allow us to be tested beyond our power to remain firm in our faith. He will give us strength to endure the test...and with it provide us with a way out.

Today's Epistle and Gospel share a common theme...getting tested, losing our way, and finding the path to redemption and our way home back to God. We know from our previous studies of Paul's letters to the Corinthians, the people had become lax in their spiritual lives. The leadership in the Corinthian Church had ignored the warning signs things were not as they should be. Paul had to set things right by showing the Corinthians some tough love. He showed them the way out of the mess they were in was to stop behaving badly, and get their spiritual lives back in order.

The Gospel is the familiar Parable of the Prodigal or Lost Son. "Prodigal" means "wastefully extravagant"...especially the waste of money. The Parable of the Lost Son is the third installment in the Trilogy that includes the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. It is the quintessential Gospel story about God's infinite capacity to forgive us when we mess up...and our path to redemption.

The young son in the story decides to strike out on his own. He asks his father to give him his portion of the property he would have inherited after his father died. He was really treating his father as if he was already dead. We can only imagine how the virtual father in the story might have felt.

There is a twist to Jesus' story. The father divides his property equally between his two sons. He gives half to the younger son...and half to his older son...at the same time. The older son doesn't have to wait until his father has died to receive his portion of the estate. This adds a surprise and radical teaching to the story...the older son should have received two-thirds of the estate. But the father loves both sons equally...even though his younger son was rejecting his father's love.

The young son is off to a foreign country to live life on his own terms. But once all of his money was gone, he had to go to work for a farmer feeding pigs...how degrading! Worse yet...he was so hungry he would gladly have eaten the pig food. He remembered the workers on his father's farm had plenty of food...and here he was starving. Was there a way out of the mess he had created?

The way out and the process of redemption for the young son begins when he admits to himself he has sinned against God and his father. He is certain God can't forgive him...and he is certain his father would never take him back as his son...maybe he could work the field with the hired hands. He will have to wait until he gets back home to find out how wrong he was on both accounts.

His father sees his young son walking toward him from a distance and runs and throws his arms around the boy. He doesn't give him a chance to finish the speech he rehearsed on the long journey home. Instead, he holds a banquet in his honor...this his son was dead, but now he is alive...he was lost, but now he has been found.

Most of us think of the Lost Son as a story with a happy ending. It is, but there is an element of the story often ignored...the older son. He is angry at his father's heartfelt welcome home for his younger brother. He doesn't think his younger brother deserves his father's mercy and forgiveness. He treats his younger brother as if he was really dead. He is angry with God.

The Parable of the Lost Son teaches us there is nothing we can do that will cause God to disown us his children or disinherit us from his love. We can never commit a sin that is so terrible it will forever place us beyond God's reach. We do have to take action. The process of our redemption begins when we admit our wrongdoing and start making changes in our lives.

Think about what our friend Saint Paul said...God always keeps his promise. He will not allow us to be tested beyond our power to remain firm in our faith. He will give us strength to endure the test...and with it provide us with a way out.

And there will be joy and happiness at our return.

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