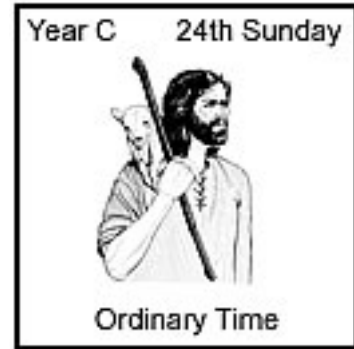


REVEREND MONSIGNOR RICHARD E. MARCHESE
THE TABLET, SEPTEMBER 16, 2007
24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14 (132C)
1 Timothy 1:12-17
Luke 15:1-32



What is amazing about God's Word is that it is always fresh and new. Every time we hear the Word of God proclaimed it opens us up to a deeper and broader experience of life in its fullness—if it is received in faith. When God speaks, as Genesis tells us, He has the power to create even from nothing. And so He fills us in our own emptiness. To have that continual awareness in us is to learn to live in the realm of the Spirit who breathes life into us. Today's Gospel is no exception to this.

Luke expresses for us in his Gospel a pervading sense of tenderness, mercy and compassion, especially in regard to one who is lost and goes astray. Whether it be the finding of the wandering sheep or the lost coin or the return of the prodigal son, the overriding sense of joy permeates the passage.

We do not always know the ways of God, as is especially evident in the person of the father in today's Gospel. Unlike the sheep or the coin which is unknowingly lost, we find a man who willingly lets go of his son and gives him his inheritance. Undoubtedly those around him must have thought him quite foolish. And yet the father allows things to play out, for he knows that in time greater riches will be given to the son. The father in the eyes of many has made a poor investment in his offspring. But the father knows how to wait. He who begets life has the power to restore it in an even fuller sense.

When the son finally returns, having squandered his share of the estate, he obviously experiences a sense of vast emptiness, being overwhelmed in his need. Sometimes when we no longer have something, or even someone, we begin to realize what we once had.

Perhaps the key thought in the whole passage is the coming to the great awareness in life of what is already before us. When the elder son complains that his brother is being treated so well, the father makes the pointed reply: "My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours."

Sadly enough we do not always live in an awareness of continually being in the Father's presence. We do not feel that what we have already been given is enough. We want more. Sometimes, unfortunately, we are too self-centered. Sometimes we are so taken with the pettiness of things, even with the constant preoccupations of duty and performance, that we fail to see beyond. We lose a sense of what we are really all about. We forget, like the elder son, that the Father's love is unique and personalized for each of us.

We live in a world of comparing ourselves to other people. We are overly sensitized to our own particular wants. When we make that leap to go beyond ourselves we experience the joy of the father in the Gospel, who never complains about his own hurt and loss. He simply waits for us, even from a distance, until the moment when, so beautifully portrayed in Luke, we allow him to run to us and embrace us and kiss us. All this begins in a moment of awareness and in a willingness to return home to the source of love. To be lost and then to be found—this is what it means for us to finally be converted. When we find ourselves embraced by the arms of his wondrous love, we can begin to understand his words: "We must celebrate and rejoice." And how great the joy must be, since we are so much more precious than a coin or even a sheep!

The whole purpose of our existence is to give God joy—for this we are born, for this we live, for this we breathe, and for this we die. There is no real explanation for what this really means, except that it must be lived to be understood.