

JMJ CHS

I wanted to tell you right up front that this could possibly be the most important homily that I've ever given. Not just in my fifteen years here with you at Holy Spirit, but in my full twenty-one years as a priest. I only came to this conclusion within the past 24 hours or less based on some things that I have experienced since I put together this homily. Maybe by the time I finish up here you'll understand why I think this is so huge.

You might have noticed that I decided to give you the short version of the Gospel today. If we had gone on further, you would have heard the most famous parable of all time, the story of the *Prodigal Son*. We have all heard it, many times, and we have probably recognized ourselves in that story as either the son, or his older brother, or who knows, maybe in some cases we have seen ourselves as the father who is awaiting the return of his wayward kid.

Well, today I thought I would focus on the earlier parables of the Gospel, particularly the first one. But I would like to tweak it. It seems I have been doing a lot of *tweaking* lately. It is the story of the *Lost Sheep*, and the parable speaks about the shepherd leaving the flock of 99 in search of that one lost sheep. My "tweak" is to reverse the numbers—what if there was only one sheep left in the safety of the pen and the other 99 were lost? What would the shepherd do then? What a challenge that would be to track down those 99 lost sheep. In the second parable, what if the woman lost nine coins, and only had one left in her pocket?

It seems to me that that is the circumstance that we have in our world right now. We here are that one lonely sheep. We here are that one remaining coin. We are the faithful remnant, while those people out there in the world are like prodigal sons and daughters, and running the risk of losing their salvation.

The point of all three parables is that there would be great rejoicing in Heaven if only a handful of people found their way back. But I guess there would be much more rejoicing if the greater number of lost souls in our world right now...found their way back.

Remember a few weeks ago when we talked about Sodom and Gomorrah? In that story, Abraham was identified as a very nice guy. I mean the people of those two evil towns were about to do great harm to those two holy messengers and God threatened destruction. It didn't seem to me as if Abraham had any skin in the game. He had no investment with those people, but just the same, he went to bat for them. "Lord, what if we could find 40 righteous souls, would you relent in your punishment?"

"Sure, why not?"

Well, in the end, they really couldn't find anybody. And so, the names of those two cities have gone down in history, having become household words for places of sin and iniquity.

Now in today's first reading, we are several hundred years later and the hero of the story is now Moses. And he seems to be a pretty nice guy, too. The interesting irony, however, is that the bad guys are not out there, they are in here. The chosen people have become depraved. And Moses ends up doing the same thing with God that his predecessor Abraham did many years earlier. He is interceding on behalf of the bad guys. In this case, it is his own brothers and sisters. The Israelites.

What both Abraham and Moses were doing was interceding on behalf of the sinners. It doesn't make any difference who they were. They were natural men standing in on behalf of God himself. They were, in essence, making reparation.

And that, my friends, is the main point I want to make today. This little band of brothers and sisters, we, the one lone sheep, we, the one remaining coin, we the faithful remnant; can we be like Abraham and Moses and “*stand in the breach*” between heaven and earth, between God and world? Can we make a difference in the trajectory of our times? Can we reverse the trend? Can we help save the world from hellfire and brimstone? Can we save Sodom and Gomorrah?

I think the answer is yes. But, to a great extent, it will depend on us, the strength of our faith, and our willingness to *extend ourselves* on behalf of those 99 lost sheep, and those 9 lost coins. After that we will have to depend on the mercy of God.

Reparation can take different forms. There is a “reparation movement” that exists out there in the Church right now in which various parishes come together and pray prayers of reparation for our poor world. We do it here on the third Tuesday of the month. A special devotional we have right after Mass which is based on the Sacred Heart devotion.

We do a *Holy hour of Reparation* on the first Fridays of the month in cooperation with the messages given by the Sacred Heart of Jesus to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. I also do a holy hour of reparation with Fr. Lobert every Thursday night from 11 to 12. I have been doing my own hour at this time for over 30 years now. On the first Saturday of the month we do the hour of reparation for blasphemies committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This devotion came out of the apparitions of our Lady of Fatima.

Probably the most important thing we can do in terms of reparation these days is to pray the family Rosary where we ask the Blessed Mother to pray for us, “*Now, and at the hour of our death.*” Earlier generations were pretty faithful in this Catholic devotion but it certainly has fallen off a lot over the years. It has made a bit of a comeback but there are still generations out there who do not have a clue about the Rosary and its promise for our times. The Blessed Mother, the *Queen of Peace*, wants us to pray itfor world peace. St. Padre Pio has called it *the weapon of our times*. Yes, it’s like a spiritual AK-47 and it is used in our battle against principalities and demons, and the powers of this present world.

I feel it is my task to encourage you, to the degree that I am able, to begin, or to return to the practice of saying the Rosary. Next weekend I will host a Saturday night movie called *Pray*. It is the message of Fr. Patrick Peyton, *The Rosary Priest* from the 1960s who encouraged that whole generation of people to “take up the beads”. And I believe he had an effect. Remember back in the old days when we prayed the rosary for the *Conversion of Russia*. Well, need I remind you that the Berlin Wall did come down, and the Hammer and Sickle Soviet flag that flew over Moscow’s Red Square, came down for the last time, on a Christmas Day?

Why would we refuse saying the Rosary? Lack of faith? Too busy? Too challenging to get the kids to sit still for the period of time it takes to pray a Rosary?

Maybe we can go to today’s second reading and get a hint from St. Paul’s letter to Timothy. Paul is very candid in describing the person he used to be. He was a prodigal son. He called himself blasphemous and arrogant. But God and His grace and mercy removed the scales from his eyes and helped him to see clearly. Maybe that can be a hope for all those prodigal children of the world, but maybe that can be a word of encouragement for us as well. Are we like St. Paul was before his conversion? Well, maybe there’s hope for us as well.

~Fr. John