

### Third Sunday after Pentecost, 10 June, 2018

*“I say to you that, even so, there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety-nine just who have no need of repentance.” Lk. 15:7*

Fr. Gabriel of St. Magdalene in his book of meditations, *Divine Intimacy*, tells us the meaning of today’s proper (prayers and readings): “Today’s liturgy is a warm invitation to confidence in the merciful love of Jesus. Even from the beginning of the Mass, the Church has us pray thus: ‘Look toward me and have pity on me, O Lord, for I am desolate and unhappy. See my misery and sadness, and pardon all my sins’ (*Introit*); then in the Collect we add: ‘O God... pour out upon us Your mercy,’ and a little later we are exhorted: ‘Cast your care upon the Lord and He will support you’ (*Gradual*). But how can we justify all this confidence in God since we are always poor sinners? The Gospel (Lk. 15:1-10) explains the grounds for this justification by relating two parables used by Jesus Himself to teach us that we can never have too much confidence in His infinite mercy: the story of the lost sheep and the account of the missing drachma.” Fr. Gabriel, p. 628. In today’s Epistle, *I Peter* 5: 6-11, we can see complementary passages on how the Christian is to deal with the sufferings God sends him. He is to have confidence in God: “*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in time of visitation; cast all your anxiety upon him, because he cares for you.*” *I Pt.* 5: 6. Those who humble themselves before God are confident that God’s “*mighty hand*” will sustain them because He cares for all who trust Him with their anxieties.

*“Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost.” Mt. 15:6*

In his book, *The Liturgical Year, Vol. 10*, Dom Prosper Gueranger explains the meaning of today’s gospel parables. “The parable of the sheep that is carried back to the fold on the shepherd’s shoulders was a favourite one with the early Christians; and they made representations of it at almost every turn. The same is put before us in today’s Gospel; that our confidence may be strengthened in God’s infinite mercy. It reminds us, in its own beautiful way, of our Lord Jesus; whom we contemplated, a few weeks back,

ascending triumphantly into heaven, carrying thither, in His arms, the lost human family, which He had won back from satan and death and sin. For, as St. Ambrose said, ‘who is the Shepherd of our parable? It is Christ, who carries thee, poor man, in His own Body, and has taken all thy sins upon Himself. The sheep is one, not by number, but by its kind. Rich Shepherd this, of whose flock all we human beings form but the hundredth part! For He has Angels, and Archangels and Dominations, and Powers, and Thrones, and all the rest; all those other countless flocks, whom He has left yonder in the mountains, that He might run after the one sheep He had lost.’” Gueranger, p. 450

#### The Lost Coin is Man Lost by Sin

Dom Gueranger quotes Pope St. Gregory the Great who also explains the meaning of the *Parable of the Woman and Ten Groats (Drachmas)* as a symbol of the redemption of man from original sin. “He that is signified by the shepherd is also meant by the woman. Jesus is God; He is the Wisdom of God. And because a good coin must bear the image of the king upon it, therefore, was it that the woman lost her groat, when man, who had been created after God’s image, strayed from that image by committing sin. But *the woman lights a lamp*; the Wisdom of God hath appeared in human flesh. A *lamp* is a light which burns in a vessel of clay; and Light in a vessel of His Body, that this Wisdom says; My strength is dried up like a potsherd (cf. Ps. 21:6). For, just as clay is made hard by the fire, so His strength was dried up like a potsherd, because it has strengthened unto glory of His resurrection, in the crucible of sufferings, the Flesh which He (Wisdom) has assumed.... Having found the groat she had lost, *the woman called together her friends and neighbours, saying: Rejoice with me! Because I have found the groat which I had lost.* Who are these *friends and neighbours* (cf. Lk. 15:9), if not the heavenly spirits, who are so near to divine Wisdom by the favours they enjoy of the ceaseless vision? But we must not, meanwhile, neglect to examine why this woman, who represents divine Wisdom, is described as having ten groats, one of which she loses, then looks for, and again finds. We must know, then, that God made both angels and men, that they might know Him: and that having made both immortal, He made both to the image of God.

The woman, then, had ten groats, because there are nine orders of angels, and man, who is to fill up the number of the elect, is the tenth groat; he was lost by his sin, but was found again, because eternal Wisdom restored him, by lighting the lamp, that is, by assuming his flesh, and through that working wonderful works, which led to his recovery.” Gueranger, p. 450-1

***“I have not come to call the just but sinners.”*** Mt. 9:13

The joy which the Good Shepherd and the woman experience when they find what was lost is compared to the joy in heaven when a sinner repents. Underlying Jesus’ words is His answer to the Pharisees who look upon Him with anger because He *“...welcomes sinners and eats with them.”* Lk. 7:2 Jesus, who knew their thoughts, answers them by telling the three parables of *“The Lost Sheep,” “The Missing Drachma,”* and *“The Prodigal Son,”* (Lk. 11:32) which illustrate the mercy of God in contrast to the scornful attitude of the Pharisees. They cannot see why, if Jesus is a holy man, He should associate with sinners. This, of course, is the major point as Jesus tells us elsewhere in the gospels: *“For this I have come into the world, to seek and save what was lost,”* (Mt. 18:11) and *“I have not come to call the just but sinners.”* (Mt. 9:13) This is why the good shepherd and the woman are so happy when they find the lost sheep and lost drachma: *“Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost.”* Mt. 15:6 and *“Rejoice with me for I have found the drachma that I had lost.”* Lk. 15: 9 In concluding these two parables, Jesus says: *“Even so, I say to you, there will be joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”* Lk. 15:10

### **Great Joy in heaven for repentant sinners**

This startling revelation of the joy in heaven when a sinner repents reminds us of some other important aspects of the spiritual life which are mentioned in today’s readings. First, the angels understand the sinner’s great struggle to overcome sin. St Peter tells us this in today’s Epistle: *“Be sober, be watchful! For your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking someone to devour.”* I Pt. 5:8 The devil is indeed powerful if one falls into his clutches, but St. Peter reminds his hearers that they will be sustained by God who will reward them with eternal glory: *“But the God of all grace, who has called us unto his eternal glory in Christ Jesus will himself, after we have suffered a*

*little while, perfect, strengthen and establish us. To him is the dominion forever and ever.”* I Pt. 5:10-11. From this struggle, we can see the second lesson of the spiritual life by which God will sustain the soul in grace in preparation for eternal glory. Another important aspect of the spiritual life related to the glory of God is that every soul which overcomes evil gives God great glory. Fr. Gabriel tells us: ***“The message of this parable applies not only to great sinners, those converted from serious sin, but also to those who turn from venial sins, who humble themselves and rise again after faults committed through weakness or lack of reflection.”*** (p. 629) St. Therese of the Child Jesus would also remind us how the Heart of Jesus ***“thrills with joy when, humbly acknowledging our fault, we come to fling ourselves into His arms, imploring forgiveness; then, He loves even more tenderly than before we fell.”*** (*Letters*).

***“...for He cares for you.”*** I Pt. 5:6-7

No wonder our good God is so happy to forgive us for all of our sins because He knows our weakness, and He rejoices when we humble ourselves, as St. Peter tells us in today’s Epistle: ***“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, so that He may in due time raise you up. Cast all your anxiety on Him, for He cares for you.”*** I Pt. 5:6-7