



September 12, 2010 The Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

*“While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion.”
Luke 15:20*

Dear Friends;

During break time at this summer’s Art Camp someone asked if anyone had ever run away from home. My sister Gretchen (one of the teachers) proceeded to tell young people how her brother, Father Ron, led all his younger siblings in running away. Soon, there followed other stories about running away. And inevitably the question arose about what happened when they returned home. Unanimously, everyone was in trouble with their parents.

The experience of running away is universal. We have all at one time or another run away or at least considered running away. And we have had to consider the consequences. There are times when we have run from God. However, God does not behave in the manner we expect—God acts differently.

Jesus invites us to stretch our imaginations of God so that we can avoid the idolatry we see in the first reading from Exodus. The “golden calf” is any false idea or projection of our ego in the place of God—as if we know completely the mind of God. It is idolatry that moves the scribes and Pharisees to complain about Jesus eating with sinners. They think they know God but Jesus wants to teach them something new.

In today’s passage from Luke Jesus gives us three images of God to consider: a shepherd who goes to great lengths to find a sheep, a woman diligently searching for a coin, and a father who acts like a mother.

To search out for the one lost sheep and carry it home on the shoulders would have taken a lot of energy. The surprising thing is rather than being exasperated he is filled with joy. The drachma coin for which the woman desperately searches could buy a day’s worth of food for a family. She is willing to use precious oil lighting a lamp in order to find it.

In Jesus’ patriarchal Jewish society a son who wanted to leave home would have disgraced the family. The son would have been considered cut off and dead. Yet the prodigal father behaves very strangely. He acts like a mother who lovingly and patiently waits for the return of her wayward child. As Dominican Sister Barbara Reid writes: “Such an image ruptures any patriarchal images of God and keeps us from literalizing the metaphor “Father.”

Jesus offers us images that present God as someone who acts very differently than we. God values each of us saint and sinner. God constantly searches us out and spends a lot of energy doing it. And when the lost are found hosts a grand feast.

Peace,

Ft Ron