

PASTOR'S REFLECTION - 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

“FORGIVEN AND FORGIVING”

As I write this reflection, I am already in the Philippines enjoying my time with my family, hearing stories about how Covid-19 affected their lives, among others. In their stories, I can feel the optimism to move on. “God is good all the time” is not just a mere slogan. They live it, they savor it, they experience it.

This resonates well with our readings this Sunday which teach us about a loving, patient, merciful and forgiving God. the overflowing mercy and forgiveness of God. Today's readings invite us to believe in a loving, patient, merciful, forgiving God who always seeks the lost and the forgotten.

Our first reading relates how God's chosen people acted perversely against the backdrop of God's continuing presence in their journey and in their struggle. They had casted for themselves an idol, an image of a calf, afforded it due worship and sacrifice, even to the point of giving credence to it, for bringing them out of Egypt. The Lord became very upset and was prepared to punish them all. But Moses intervened and humbly asked God to forgive His people. God heard his plea.

Our second reading echoes the same mercy and forgiveness of God. Paul, who once was a blasphemer, a persecutor of Christians, a man of violence gained mercy and forgiveness from God because of his sincerity of heart.

Today's gospel also speaks of the mercy and forgiveness of God. In this case, three parables are mentioned to affirm the magnitude of that mercy - the parables of the “Lost Sheep”, of the “Lost Coin” and of the “Prodigal Son”. Many tax collectors and sinners came to Jesus and drew criticism on the part of the Pharisees and the scribes. They were grumbling because Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them.

These readings encourage us to live every day the grace of being forgiven. This realization should motivate us to forgive ourselves knowing that God has forgiven us first despite all the transgressions that we have done. The Hebrew term repentance, *teshuvá*, means a return to God by a person who has already experienced God's “goodness and compassion”.

Naturally as God's forgiven children, let us ask God for the grace of showing such forgiveness to others. May we have the courage and the good will “as forgiven prodigals”, to extend the same compassion, kindness, and forgiveness to others. Let us continue to be aware that our brothers and sisters who may have done wrong to us deserve also such divine forgiveness. Let us open our eyes to see and ears to hear that Jesus is never tired of welcoming us back home, all of us!