

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
1 COR. 10.1 ST. LUKE 15.11

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God keeps his promise...he will not allow us to be tested beyond our power to remain firm...he will give us the strength to endure it...and he will provide us with a way out!

Saint Paul knew what it was like to be tested...he waxed eloquent about all the things he had to endure...having stones thrown at him...getting hit with sticks...being shipwrecked...floating around in the open sea...and he had to deal with people who said unkind things about him... even people in the Church.

Paul tells us we should expect to get tested just like everyone else. We can set ourselves up for a fall if we think the cross gives us an exemption from life's challenges. What the cross does is give us the way to meet life's challenges...and a way out of the messes we sometimes create for ourselves.

The Parable of the Prodigal or Lost Son is one of Jesus' best-known stories. It's really the third part of a trilogy; its companion stories are the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. In each of the stories something gets lost and something gets found...and there is happiness when that which was lost gets found.

In the story of the Lost Sheep...the shepherd goes looking for his lost sheep. Sheep were valuable...but this shepherd loved the sheep and carried it on his shoulders back home.

In the story of the Lost Coin...the silver coin was much more valuable than sheep to the widow who lost it. She is happy when she finds it.

What about the story of the Lost Son in today's Gospel? What value do we place on a father's unconditional love for his wayward son?

The young son asks his father for his portion of the inheritance he expected to receive when his father died. He is really acting as if his father was already dead. And so he goes off to a foreign country to waste all of his money on what he thinks is the good life...until things take a turn for the worse.

God does not make bad things happen to us but he does allow us to use our free will to make choices. Sometimes we create our own tests without knowing what we are doing.

Faced with starvation, the young son ends up working for a farmer...feeding pigs...cleaning the pigsty...and wishing he had the pig food for his own. Things couldn't get much worse.

Our wayward son thinks he has messed his life up so badly even God can't reach him. He is convinced his father must hate him...but maybe he can get his father to give him a job working the fields with the other employees...at least they had food.

It's at the point the young son realizes what a mess he has created for himself he begins to find redemption...and the way out of his mess...and the way home. The journey might not be easy...but staying where he was at was not an option.

The father welcomed his wayward son home with open arms. He didn't even give his son a chance to finish his rehearsed speech. He threw his arms around him and kissed him and welcomed him home as his son, not as a paid employee. Then the young son realized he had never lost his father's love...a love more valuable than any amount of money.

Messes...sometimes we are very good at creating them...we say or do something without thinking of the consequences. Sometimes our messes lead us into despair and thinking we're beyond God's help and love.

Saint Paul tells us we can expect to be tested, whether we create the test like the lost son, or the test comes our way through no fault of our own and challenges us...and we find ourselves getting discouraged.

Jesus wants us to know we are never so lost God can't find us and we never lose his love. He will not allow us to be tested beyond our power to remain firm...he will give us the strength to endure it...and he will provide us with a way out.

And with the way out...we will find our way home. And there will be much happiness and rejoicing for us...even in heaven!

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