

HOW MUCH WILL THE LORD PUT UP WITH

I can't put up with this anymore. I have had it! We have heard someone say this or we have heard ourselves say it or at least think it. Whatever the particular thing is, there is this point at which we allow our disappointment or frustration to overflow to the point where we simply will no longer stand for what is going on. So. Does this ever apply to God. I mean, how much will the Lord put up with? That is the question for this Sunday.

The readings for today provide us with an answer. Take Moses in the reading from Exodus. We will look at him and at the various people described in the Word of God for today. Moses is descending from the Mount of Sinai where he has been for almost six weeks. God has been codifying and revealing the basic tenets and mandates that will govern our relationship with Him and His relationship, his covenant with us. As Moses descends the Mountain with the Ten Commandments, he discovers that the people have crafted a calf of gold and are in a debauched orgy of ecstatic but false worship. Moses is angry. God is angry. God tells Moses to get out of the way because God intends to destroy the people for their very quick idolatry after so soon being freed by God of their slavery in Egypt. They have replaced the living God, the invisible living God, with an inanimate God of their own making. It violates the first of the commandments of the Ten. Moses did not even get to present them yet and already the people break trust and fidelity with God.

But suddenly Moses is in the breach defending his people who are really God's people. It isn't God being put to the test here, it is Moses. Having been given the Commandments will Moses also intervene with God on behalf of these people? This is a test for Moses. It isn't that Moses gets God to change his mind. Moses actually is brought into the genuine alignment with God. God desires to be merciful and Moses, despite delivering the true teaching of the Father, must also bring God's mercy to his people. So, God does not punish.

Saint Paul calls himself the worst of sinners. He is an old man now. He will not live much longer. He is writing to Timothy one of his companions on his missionary journeys earlier in his life. Paul is reminiscing about what he had done once upon a time. He still has regrets though he has long been forgiven. All know Paul's story of persecution, imprisonment, and mob violence against the Church in the early years. Often when you are old you look back again at your youth and the sins you see there impact you again "What was I thinking?" is the question we ask. We see our sin in all its reality. We are sorry. Paul is sorry. And Grateful. God has chosen Paul to be the very one, despite his past, to bring the message of the good news of God's forgiveness to all the people of the world especially those who were gentiles. God's mercy has overcome Paul's sins. But Paul knows what he did. Paul admits what he did. Paul is sorry for what he did. Paul repents of what he did. Repentance. Without it we cannot experience the mercy and forgiveness. It is not that our repentance causes God to forgive us. God is love. Forgiveness is what love looks like when it encounters sins. No. Repentance is what

opens us to the mercy and forgiveness that God gives. It does not cause God to forgive us.

In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15 there are three stories--two little ones and one longer one. All have instances of people losing something. In the first case it is property, one of the sheep is missing. In the second some of the woman's money has gone missing. In each case there is a very diligent search and an eventual finding of what has been lost. Jesus makes the point that we as people, because of the effect of sin on our lives, lose our way at times. Our God is a searching God who comes looking for us as diligently as the man and woman in these stories. And God finds us. He brings us back. But, in order to do so, we must want to come back, want to be restored, want to be found. The way we do that is by acknowledging our sin and repenting of it. That repentance opens us to the grace of God in this moment.

The third story is so familiar to us. Which of the three figures do you tend to identify with when you hear the story. Are you the prodigal who wanted to go your own way and tended not to listen for wisdom and was intent on living your own way, beyond your means and carelessly. Are you the older son who feels terribly un-appreciated, who is filled with resentment at the father for allowing what should not be allowed and at his brother for his carelessness? Are you the father who is trying to do the balancing act of accommodating his sons but does not seem to be effective with either? In my assessment we are each of these characters at different times in our lives.

The younger son does not really have a conversion experience. He did come to his senses but it's because he is hungry, and nobody cares about his plight. He believes he has forfeited his role as son but hopes for at least being treated better and given some food. His repentance is anything but heartfelt. But, strange as it may seem, it is enough for his father to stop his memorized apology, direct the finest robe to be brought out and put on him, with a ring on his finger, and sandals on his feet—and the fatted calf prepared for a happy banquet. And why? Because he has returned. His father had lost him. It was as if he was dead. Even though every day he would go down to the road and look for his son's return. And the day he sees him what does he do, this old man? He runs to him. He runs. To his son. Old men don't run. Is Jesus saying that his Father would run to us if we repent of our sins? Isn't that precisely what He says from the cross? "Father forgive them..." and to the good thief: "Today you will be with me in paradise." My friends, we don't have to have perfect contrition. The Lord will accept what we are able to give him. He just wants us back. He will put up with a lot from us. He DOES put up with a lot from us. Always did. But He does want us to forsake our sin—even if imperfectly—and let ourselves be found. He seeks to run to us. Who does this? But the Living God.

May He bless us today and give us his peace.