Homily for the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time(9/15/2019)

Rev. Francis Kim

A priest went into a barbershop, got a haircut, thanked the barber, and asked how much he would pay him. The barber said, “Father, you’re a holy man, a man of God, I couldn’t charge you.” The priest said, “Thank you very much,” and left. The next day, magically appearing on the doorstep of the barbershop were 12 gold coins.

A few days later, a Buddhist monk went in for a shave and a shine, and when the time came to pay, the barber says, “No money, please, you’re a spiritual leader, a man of the people. I’m not gonna charge you.” The next day, magically appearing on the doorstep are 12 silver coins.

The following week, a Rabbi came in, got a haircut, went to pay, and the barber said, “No, Rabbi, you are a learned man, a wise man, I can’t take any money from you, go in peace.” So, the next day, magically appearing on the doorstep of the barbershop are 12 rabbis.

Today’s Gospel may be called the Gospel of the ‘lost and found.’ There is the sheep that was lost and found, the coin that was lost and found, and finally, the son who was lost and found. This stories highlight the essential elements of what true forgiveness and reconciliation are all about.

Jesus was surrounded by tax collectors and all kinds of sinners. He even ate with them joyfully. The name given to Jesus by the Pharisees and scribes was ‘a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ Pharisees and scribes were complaining that Jesus was welcoming sinners and dining with them. Then, Jesus addressed three parables to them, each one illustrating God’s mercy.

In an impressive way, Jesus evokes in these parables God’s concern for the salvation of those who get lost and the rejoicing over their being found. God does not drive away any sinners. He is concerned about them, searches for them, and He is overjoyed when He finds them again.

By telling us the story of the prodigal son, Jesus tells us to forgive, to welcome back, to give another chance.

The prodigal son went off to a distant country and loses everything. This unknown ‘distant country’ is more than a place. It is really a way of living or a condition of the heart. We often go away to the ‘distant country,’ when we leave behind the Church, Gospel, or community to follow our own way.

Then, the father waited and watched and hoped his son might return. In the first two parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin, the person who lost them, the shepherd and the lady, actively searched for what they lost until they found what they were seeking. With the prodigal son, the father did not actively chase after his son to drag him back. He just waited and longed for his son’s return.

As in the parable of the sheep and the coin, God actively seeks to lead us back to Himself if we have strayed, but as in the prodigal son, God waits for us to make the decision to return.

God respects our free will, and if we choose to separate ourselves from Him, it is up to us to choose to return or as the parable puts it, “to come to our senses.”

When the prodigal son comes to his senses, we hear his confession: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.” That moment is the key to reconciliation and the key to the way of peace.

It is a grace to be able to say, “I have sinned.” It is a sign of moral awakening and spiritual maturity to be able to say, “I have sinned.” We need to repent and say like this to be found, “I am sorry for I have sinned.”

Our heavenly Father always hears our cries. Full repentance is always answers by full forgiveness!

After the prodigal son came back home, this story has a new beginning. Returning home, confessing sins, and receiving forgiveness are not the end of the story. It is the beginning of a new life with great joy and happiness.

When people who had sinned were accepted and invited by Jesus, they found a new future lies ahead and the strength to make a new beginning. When sinners ate meal with Jesus, they were not sinners any more.

Jesus said to them, “Rejoice with me because I have found you.” It is pure rejoicing that replaces the past sorrow and danger, and overflows on to all those shared the pain of the loss. This is very heavenly joy and banquet which we can partake on earth.

Every Eucharist is both a memorial of suffering and love which the caring Shepherd endured in order to save the lost sheep, and a joyful celebration of the fruitfulness of His finding.

So, let us celebrate in this Eucharist with joy and gratitude for we have been among those people who are rescued by God’s unconditional love.

God is waiting for us always, and He will rejoice in our returning home!