

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 11 September 2022

Scriptures: Exodus 32:7-14; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-32

Homily: Fr. Ken

Students of scripture are cognizant of the fact that, in dealing with a biblical text, it is often more important to know the issues being addressed by the author in his or her own time, than to know the history of the past events being recalled.

In explaining this weekend's Exodus, for example, scholars are not so much concerned with surfacing the specific Egyptian "calf-god" being worshipped by some recently liberated 12th century B.C. Hebrew slaves, as they are interested in discovering the eighth century concerns about calves that prompted the Exodus author to include this event in his writing.

Most likely, unless the author's immediate readers were not having some sort of "calf problems", he would never have included the problems their ancestors were having with calves during their Sinai wanderings 4,000 years before.

The prophet Hosea and the Exodus author in today's reading insist that the cherubs must go, even if Jewish priests had originally installed them in the shrines.

Of course, the Biblical Israelites were not the last people of faith to replace the real God with an idol. Our God's personality goes far beyond any symbol humans can create.

In the Gospel, Luke's community was likewise dealing with some false images of God. If they did not have problems with God's forgiving personality, Luke would not have provided three stories about "finding the lost one". It is easy to conceive of a God who strictly rewards or punishes everyone according to their actions, a God symbolized by a judge balancing our lives on eternal scales.

But the Jesus in Luke's gospel insists that worshipping such a human projection of God is just as idolatrous as worshipping Hosea's calves.

Though one's image of a God who rewards the good and punishes sinners might inspire awe and warn people to take moral responsibility for their actions, it is not really God.

Jesus is convinced that God constantly steps outside human logic, and expects followers to do the same, especially when it comes to forgiveness.

Jesus' prodigal God is just as spontaneous and illogical in searching for lost people, as people are in searching for lost things, even if the mercy expended in that search exceeds the logic of strict justice.

The author of Paul's First Letter to Timothy reminds us of Christianity's most basic belief: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these, I am the foremost".

Only God's passion to save all people can explain God's actions through Jesus.

It is essential for people of biblical faith to understand that "salvation" is much more than just "getting into heaven".

As one scripture scholar recently noted, the biblical term "salvation" normally refers to a "rescue or deliverance from whatever ails us" right here and now.

Finally, it offers us a way to transform both ourselves and the world in which we live. This only happens when we build loving communities: communities where all are invited and all are welcome; communities where all people are equal; communities where we show love for one another in all that we say and all that we do.

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