

## 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Lost and Found

We have heard these stories so many times that we listen without hearing. The message is clear and concise. The nature of God is merciful and forgiving. The nature of man is self-centered and self-righteous.

The first reading tells of the Israelites wanting to worship their way. Instead of worshiping God in the platform of the Ark, as told in the prior chap. 25, they choose to worship him in the form of a calf. Rather than accept him as all-encompassing, they choose to put him in a place.

Moses begged God to remember his servants. God remembered and changed his mind. This is not our concept of God, but the lesson shows that there is power in prayer.

The second reading sums up true faith. The author makes a confessional statement. Because of the ignorance of the enormity of his sins, God was merciful to him. He was given the grace of Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel, the 3 parables show that God's mercy breaks through human restrictions: the 99 sheep are abandoned so that the one is rescued, the woman turns her house upside down to recover a paltry sum, and the young son is welcomed back after leaving his father and brother in the lurch.

His inheritance was not rightfully his until his father died. He sticks his brother with all the responsibility. Caring for pigs is a gentile task. It's the lowest of occupations and symbolizes his total rejection of the law.

Is the prodigal truly repentant or just going through the motions to save his life? Does the older son forgive his brother? Does he ever understand his father? The first two parables are tied up with conclusive endings. Why does Luke leave loose ends in the prodigal story?

Does he wish generations of Christians to struggle with completing the story for themselves?

Who is the sinner, who is the saved, who are we who ponder the message? It's a painful study in natures: the nature of God, the nature of humanity, and the nature of prayer.