

FATIMA 12th September, 2010.

EVENING MASS: *Ex. 32:7-11, 13-14; 1Tim.1:15-17; Lk.15:1-32.*

The letter to the Hebrews describes Moses as *trustworthy in the household of God* (Heb.3:2). When, however, the letter (to the Hebrews) compares Moses to Jesus, it describes Moses as "*trustworthy in the house of God as a servant*", while Jesus is described as "*trustworthy in the house of God as a Son*" (Heb.3:2-6). Thus, both Moses and Jesus are described as *trustworthy in God's house*, one, however, as a **servant**, and the other as a **son**. "*Trustworthiness in the house of God*" is, then, the issue. It is the way in which Moses resembles Christ and anticipates his coming and his ministry. In "*trustworthiness in the house of God*", Moses *prefigures Christ!*

The trustworthiness of Moses in the house of God describes the way Moses distinguished himself serving the people God had entrusted into his care. Indeed, when God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush (Ex.3:4ff.), as the God of "*his fathers*": "*the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*", He went on to say to Moses: "*So, come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt*". In this mission, that God entrusted to Moses, He also entrusted into his care the people of Israel, their life and their destiny in the world and before God, especially as his covenant people. And so, Moses assumed responsibility for the people of Israel in every detail of their lives. Their fear at the crossing of the Red Sea was his fear; and he encouraged them (Ex.14). He provided them with *bread and water* (Ex.16-17). He judged their cases (Ex.18), stood before God in their stead and brought them the Word of God, as their prophet. But most significantly for our celebration tonight, Moses also interceded about the sins of the sons of Israel (Ex.17:8ff.; 32:11-14), bore their weaknesses, their bickering and quarrelsomeness, even to the point of giving up his own friendship with God and his own his life (Ex.32:32).

Moses, the "*trustworthy servant of God*", was Moses in whose hands God could entrust his people, the sons of Israel, knowing that Moses would dedicate himself totally to helping the sons of Israel live as *God's people*, atoning for and interceding about their sins. And it is in this that Moses prefigured Jesus Christ as also *trustworthy in God's house*", for, if Moses interceded about the sin of his people, the sons of Israel, Jesus Christ, as St. Paul tells us (in the 2nd Reading), "*came into the world to save sinners*"!

Moses prayed for the forgiveness of sins; but Jesus came to take away sins, becoming the means, indeed, the only means of forgiveness of sin and of the bestowal of salvation (Acts 4:12). Thus Zechariah would also prophecy about Jesus, saying that *Jesus would give to his people knowledge of salvation by forgiveness of their sins* (Lk.1:27).

This offer of salvation in Jesus through the forgiveness of sins is what St. Paul affirms to us tonight, and presents himself as a beneficiary: *Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I only am foremost* (1Tim.1:15).

Paul, indeed, may have considered himself the “*foremost sinner*” to be saved by Christ through the forgiveness of his sins; but he was not to be the first and the last, and certainly not the only one. For, as the parables of the Gospel Reading tonight (Lk.15) tell us, God causes people in various situations and under different circumstances to make an experience of salvation through his forgiving love; and this is how Luke, the Evangelist, carries this message to us:

Lk.15 tells us about three things which get lost and are found. The finding of the lost things brings great joy, but they are found under interestingly diverse circumstances.

The Lost Coin: If a coin gets lost, it lies silently where it has fallen. By its nature, a lost coin cannot contribute anything to its search; and if it is found, then it is purely through the diligent and assiduous labour of the owner that it is found. Jesus suggests that some sinners who are shown God’s mercy and forgiveness are like the lost coin. They are not in any way responsible for their return to grace and favour with the Lord. It is God who expends mercy and forgiveness on them out of his love.

St. Paul, we may say, was like this; and as he himself would admit: *It is by the grace of God that I am what I am.*

The Lost Sheep: A lost sheep, by contrast with a lost coin, can contribute to its discovery; for it can bleat to attract the attention of the shepherd who is looking for it. With this Jesus suggests how some sinners can attract God’s attention to their situation with their prayer. They can pray to God, asking for his mercy and forgiveness. Such were Mary Magdalene at the feet of Jesus, the repentant thief who was crucified with Jesus and weeping Peter after denying Jesus.

The Lost (prodigal) Son: Finally, the lost (prodigal) son returns to his father’s love out of reflection and a remembrance of how things were in his father’s house. The **memory** of a past experience of the father’s love draws the lost son back to his father’s house; and with this Jesus suggests how some sinners work their way back to the experience of God’s forgiveness under the grace of a remembrance of the past (cfr. Jer.6:16).

Such, then, is the diversity of ways through which people make an experience the taking away of sin by Jesus and the experience of the forgiveness of God; and it is an expression of the limitlessness of God’s offer of his forgiveness and the countless ways of coming to make an experience of God’s loving forgiveness.

This is very assuring message to all of us, gathered in pilgrimage at this place of God’s call to conversion and the offer of his forgiveness. Whatever our situation is, and however hopeless our situation before God may be, the message of our celebration tonight invites us not to despair of our situations before God, for boundless is his forgiving power, and his *loving mercy endures forever!*