**24th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle C**

September 14/15, 2019

Ex 32: 77-11, 13-14; 1 Tim 1: 12-17; Lk 15: 1-32

These are powerful readings today, stories about conversion. Makes me step back and think about life. There are three great conversion stories upon which I would like to reflect with you today.

The first is the conversion of St. Peter. The second is the conversion of St. Paul. The third is the conversion of St. Augustine.

St. Peter was a chosen man. Chosen to lead the Church. Chosen to strengthen the followers of Jesus after Jesus would ascend to the Father. Peter was a fisherman. A big man for his day. Stocky and strong. A man of great passion, even impulsive at times. He no doubt had big thick rough hands from all the fishing he had done. You see, fishing back then was not the fly fishing of today. Instead, he had to row a boat, cast a net, and haul that net aboard with his bare hands. I bet Peter had one of those crushing grips when he shook someone’s hand. Peter was capable of hanging on to something or someone despite the weight. Once he grabbed a hold onto something, he hung on. But Peter let go of Jesus at a time of great need. Peter let go of Jesus when Jesus was being led away to be crucified. He denied the Lord. When Jesus was sinking, Peter let go. This is in contrast to the time when Peter was sinking in the sea and Jesus grabbed him and pulled him up to save him. Peter understood, by experience, the importance of grabbing on and holding on to someone in need. He understood the great sin of letting go of his relationship with Jesus. And he repented of his sin.

St. Paul was a man blinded by his self-righteousness before his conversion. Paul was self-assured. “I am on the right heritage. I follow the laws. I can kill Christians because I am right and they are wrong.” Paul was blind, angry, self-righteous, and a murderer. But Jesus blinded him in a different way. Jesus blinded him by the light of the truth on the way to Damascus. The Bible tells us Paul was literally blinded by his experience of Jesus on the road. Scales formed on his eyes that kept him from seeing. He experienced physically what was truly spiritually. With his baptism, the scales were gone, and he began to see again. Paul began to see that true faith was a gift of a graced relationship with Jesus Christ. He began to see that the laws were meant to keep us in that grace, in that relationship with Jesus. Paul had to repent from worshipping the law to worshipping Jesus. He had to go from blindness to sight. And he did.

St. Augustine was a man of great passion. He was a slave to those passions and his attempts to justify his behavior with what we now would call “New Age Philosophies” but then was called rhetoric and Greek philosophy. Augustine was a man who thought pleasing the body and the senses – things like physical health, vigor, mental learnedness – were the greatest goods of life. He rejected the truths of faith for the so-called truths of the world, and the corruption of the body, just like people do today with the rejection of Christianity and the embrace of spiritualism and philosophy. He had to repent of his slavery to his addictions and vices and embrace freedom in Christ and the pursuit of virtue. And he did.

Peter abandoned his relationship with the Lord.

Paul was blind by his lack of faith.

Augustine was a slave to the world.

In the story of the Prodigal Son which we heard today, we see all three of these sins described. The prodigal son abandoned his father; he was blind to the truth and lacking in faith; and he was a slave to his passions. Like Peter, Paul, and Augustine, he too was converted and repented.

Where is our need for conversion in our own lives? How have we abandoned relationship to which we should be faithful, relationships such as marriage, parenthood, and friendships? How have we been blind to the truths of our faith? In other words, who or what is our God? In what ways are we enslaved by things of this world; what are our vices, and where do we need to grow in virtue?

Where is our struggle?

Wherever it is, God is a forgiving Father who runs to us as soon as we turn back. He runs to embrace us.