

Church: A Lost and Found Department

Intro. This our Lost and **Not** Found Department. What's in here? There are eyeglasses, mostly readers; a few pairs of sunglasses - never any really good ones although a few years ago there *was* one with a "C" on it (Don't ask; it's gone). There are expired prayer books and rosaries; kid's toys; and hats. There is never a key for a 1969 GTO. Most of what is in here apparently is not worth being found. That is what the Pharisees saw when they looked at the sinners and tax collectors gathered around the Lord.

I. I want to highlight some details. The younger son was legally entitled to either nothing or one-third of his father's property after the father's death. The older son would get either *all* of it or two-thirds if he just did what was expected of him, including

respecting his father. The younger son gave away his inheritance and I don't mean his money. He gave away his sonship. The older son was a "begrudger," an ungrateful son, no better than his brother. The father was hurt by both sons yet never gave up on love. He went to find them and bring them home. He ran to the younger, an undignified thing for a man in that culture to do. He left his guests at the party to plead with the elder. The younger son came to his senses. The older son, well, we don't know; the story is unfinished. Did he come to his senses and reclaim his inheritance as a son also or stand outside forever? The initial point of the parable is for the Pharisees and scribes who complained the Lord was hanging out with sinners and not them. They should understand mercy and rejoice in the return of those who come to their senses. It is the

scribes and Pharisees who do not come to their senses and remain resentful of those who do. The point for us today might be the same. We often look down our noses at other people we judge as sinners, lazy or outright criminals. That does not advance the mission of Jesus Christ and keeps *us* from the grace of mercy ourselves. If we cannot be merciful, we cannot expect mercy.

Concl. In Dante's poem, "Inferno," about the journey to hell, he takes readers down through the Nine Circles of Hell. The word images are filled with people in terrible agony. A sign at the entrance to the hell where Satan lives reads, "Abandon hope all ye who enter here." [*Inferno*, Canto III, line 9, Dante Aligheri, 1308-1320]. Michelangelo painted a version of this in the Sistine Chapel, putting in it faces of people who he was mad at, including a

pope. A sign on the front door of every house of worship could read, "Lost and Found Department." Another sign could read, "Find hope all ye who enter here." God's word and sacrament are here to *rebuild* hope that is lost and *strengthen* hope that is slipping away. When one who has been away returns, the moment is for joy, not griping and complaining. **People are always worth finding and bringing home. This pandemic of almost three years has splintered our communities to pieces, especially our parish gatherings with the Lord here. Many are still away. Search families, friends and even strangers to find and bring home to the Lord this Easter. We ourselves have been lost and someone went out to find us.**

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