

24<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year “C” *Imploring the Lord in hope and trust*  
September 10-11, 2022  
Readings: Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-32

Moses is a towering figure in the Old Testament and today’s passage illustrates a reason why, showing the depth of his intercessory power on behalf of the people. He intercedes for his people out of love and God relents in the punishment that he had threatened towards them. If you have ever doubted the efficacy of intercessory prayer, re-read this passage!

The Church’s doctrine of the Communion of Saints is based upon a belief in the power of intercessory prayer. God knows what we desire even before we ask him. He had no need to hear Moses’ intercession; He knew what was in his heart. Still, He awaited his petition, respecting that the dignity of God’s children lies precisely in our freedom to act.

A late 4<sup>th</sup> century Syrian monk comforted those who were questioning God by writing: “Do not be troubled if you do not immediately receive from God what you ask him; for he desires to do something even greater for you, while you cling to him in prayer.”<sup>1</sup> If we do not receive from God what we desire, too quickly we respond in bewilderment, frustration or even anger. We think, “This isn’t fair,” or “God has abandoned me.”

In times of difficulty, our feeling of abandonment can be very real and painful. Surely, we invoke the saints to intercede for us. As they are more closely united to Him, the saints exercise their intercession on our behalf by fixing the Church more firmly in holiness. But we also rely on one another. When we know that others are praying for us, it draws us more closely together in a spiritual bond of communion and friendship.

Moses’ intercession is a concrete realization of his sacred duty towards them. Like a loving Father, he implores God’s mercy, even as he calls the people to greater holiness and to a conversion of life. How often have we fashioned our own *molten calves*, our perceived measures of security, that only turn out to be false and illusory? We search for happiness, but all

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<sup>1</sup> Evagrius Ponticus *De Oratione* 34: PG 79, 1173 (345-399 A.D.)

too often in ways that cannot lead to lasting peace. The parable of the lost sheep invites us to recognize the sense in which we are lost and searching, and the comfort of knowing that God is seeking after us.

For a moment, consider forgiveness from God's perspective. Imagine the sense of the joy that the Lord feels when someone returns to the faith after a long absence. God seeks us, calling us to trust and repentance. He is beckoning each time those pangs of conscience prick our souls.

Ever clear on the requirements of the moral law, the Church remains ready to welcome sinners back to the fold. St. Augustine wisely wrote, "God wills that our desire should be exercised in prayer, that we may be able to receive what he is prepared to give."<sup>2</sup>

So, we must prepare ourselves to be found by God, to be pardoned, but also prepare to make changes to any behavior that contravenes God's commandments. Ask God to deepen your desire to embrace your daily Cross, if that is what is needed. Ask for an increased desire to turn away from vice, and to embrace that better path to holiness.

But if we do so with a divided heart, then we will be at war with ourselves. Our anger towards God's seeming lack of response may reflect the divided quality of our request. God is fully prepared to turn away his wrath, and Jesus will continue to seek the lost sheep in our midst.

Let us pray for the grace to remain united together in prayer and intercession for one another, relying on the manifold graces of God to lead us safely home.

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<sup>2</sup> Augustine *Epistle* 130, 8, 17, quoted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. #2737