

24 Sunday C

September 11, 2022

St. Patrick

It's been a hard week. This past week we have felt panicked (The text coming in: "Get inside right away! The city is under "shelter-in-place."), shocked, saddened, angry, and afraid. It feels like our own 9/11 attack.

The two men who murdered—well, one thread is that neither had a father close in their youth. They had no father-figure. Here in this neighborhood and church, over the decades we are blessed that our Deacon Eugene Champion has taken on that father-role for many young people.

Oh, there are many overlapping gaps which result ultimately in murder and crime. An absence of a father may be just one of them.

This Sunday's Gospel is about a father.

This parable is told only in St. Luke's Gospel. In telling the story with tender detail, Jesus paints a picture of how our God extravagantly loves us.

The younger, wayward son wastes the inheritance his father has given him. Only when he hits rock bottom does he decide to return home. And then, we hear a gem of a line. Listen, again: **"While the son was still a long way from home, the father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him tenderly."** No tough love here. The son was still half-way out with his rehearsed line, **"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son..."** Already—*already!*—the father was pressing his son's head against his chest, arms surrounding his son, the father crying with joy.

St. Patrick's: that's *our* God, as shown us in Jesus. If any of us has ever been lost in a morass of bad choices, or afraid to confess a sin because it's so hard to say aloud, or ever felt ostracized for one reason or another: then, we can relish the joy which Jesus has for us this Sunday.

In an earlier season of life I was much like the older son in the parable: smug that I pretty well kept all the rules. It was some thirty years ago when I hit the wall, and then felt like the wayward son in my own life. For two years I was on a leave-of-absence from priestly ministry. There was something in my life that confused me, and I didn't know how to "fix it."

In early January 1988, one of our priests died who was only in his fifties. I wanted to go to the wake to express my sympathy to his mother, he being her only child. I came to the church, snow and ice having been shoveled off the front steps of the church. Few came to the visitation. As I entered the vestibule, the narthex, there was a man there—only he—who represented an organization in the diocese. I was dressed with a suit and tie. When he saw me walk through the entrance hall of the church, he said to me, "You mean they let someone like you in the church."

I walked into the nave and embraced the deceased priest's mother. Then I left quickly. Those words of that man in the vestibule stung painfully. They hurt. I felt like an outsider. Yes, I felt like the younger son in Jesus' story this Sunday.

Only then did I truly experience that love of Jesus in my life. His mercy, his forgiveness—they became real to me, especially when I felt in exile, excluded, not belonging.

Friends: Once you know that embrace of God, it changes everything. That's salvation and, at one moment or another, each of us needs to experience it.

Think about it: We don't know how the younger son turned out after the father had the big party for him. I wonder if he messed up again.

We *do* know, however, that the father would always be on the front porch, on his tiptoes, straining his eyes as he looked for his child's return, his arms open for an embrace.

Just this Sunday: Make the first step back. Experience the embrace. Know Jesus' mercy. May we and our city truly feel the embrace of our God!

General Intercessions

September 11, 2022

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

That we, the church, might experience the tender mercy of God in our lives; we pray to you, O Lord—

Gift our children and teenagers with Jesus' Spirit as they continue their formation within our Catechesis of the Good Shepherd; we pray to you, O Lord—

Bless with your Holy Spirit all our catechists here at St. Patrick's—those who break open God's Word, and those who teach the love of the Good Shepherd; we pray to you, O Lord—

As we remember the 9/11 terrorist attacks twenty-one years ago today: for the safety of all, and for the healing of those who have suffered from terrorism, from kidnapping, from bigotry, and from violence; we pray to you, O Lord—

For those estranged from the church and from God's love; and for those suffering from illness or depression; we pray to you, O Lord—

Embrace with your love in eternity all who have died from violence, especially those in our city this week—Eliza Fletcher, Dewayne Tunstall, Richard Clark, Allison Parker, and Corteria Wright, we pray to you, O Lord—

