

**Feeling God's Anxiety**     Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time/C     September 11, 2016  
9:00 AM     Ex 32:7-11, 13-14;     1 Tm 1:12-17;     **Lk 15:1-32**     (Jesus' words are a revelation of something very new, and it wasn't appreciated, and I wonder if even you and I appreciate it very much.)

Jesus' mission involved many different tasks, among them the most difficult was revealing the heart of the Father. In contrast, healing the sick, cleansing lepers, feeding multitudes was easy—no problem, as they say. But **connecting people to the heart of God: that was so difficult** it actually killed him.

And here we have a story of how **Jesus is working to bring the marginal together**, to welcome the outcasts, morally and physically, into the heart of God; and he gets this resounding **criticism from the leaders**, the scholars of the Torah. The point he is trying to make is something that they could not see, and in a way they were not really at fault; rather, **their formation was at fault**.

What Jesus was trying to say is that **God experiences anxiety in regard to his people**. The story of the woman looking for a lost coin or a shepherd looking for a sheep is about anxiety. You know this yourself whenever you lose something, however relatively insignificant. For example I lose all the time my car keys. Well of course I could get new ones easily, but when I have to go somewhere it's very important that I find them, and I can be in a panic looking for where I put them. And so it is with other things: wallets and purses, and even worse a child who wanders off and you don't know where he or she is, or a child that doesn't come home on time. At first you may be angry, but then after a certain length of time that anger turns into fear and fear can turn into panic.

And this is what Jesus is talking about in regard to God. **And his audience didn't get it**. According to them, God really didn't have feelings. He could only care about his law and he could be angry when his law was violated, other than that God didn't have feelings. That is the way they were formed; that is what they thought. So **Jesus' words are a revelation of something very new**, and it wasn't appreciated, and **I wonder if even you and I appreciate it very much**. Do we really let the truth of this sink in? **Do we think that God really has anxiety about us, or our families, or the Syrians, or the Israelis, or the Palestinians?** Do we really let

this sink in? Because not only was Jesus explaining what he was doing—he was doing that—but he was also eliciting helpers. He was looking for help. **He was looking for disciples to help him find the lost sheep.**

Now this suggests that **there are three different kinds of people.** Using the Ignatian form of contemplation we might try to **picture ourselves in this story**, and which one are we, or which one am I? **Am I one who is lost, wandering, not having a clue where I am?** Am I afraid, hungry, or scared, or lonely? It could be so. **Or are we safely grazing?** That is an image of the Church: sheep safely grazing. There is a beautiful piece of music by Bach about that: sheep safely grazing, an image of the Church. **Or are we** in the third group: **people actually sharing God's anxiety over others**, looking for the lost, **trying to lead them back to God?** This is also an image of the Church, the apostolic Church, the missionary Church, the Church that our leadership here at St. Margaret Mary wants us all to become: intentional disciples with hearts on fire with the love and the anxiety of God.

**Now it is possible that at different times in our lives we are in each of them.**

Sometimes we may be lost. Sometimes we may be safely grazing. And sometimes we may be on fire. The gospel suggests that **no matter where we are, this is good news.** If we are lost, we can look to God for salvation. In fact God will find us, for this is God's goal and delight. If we are safely grazing, that may be fine for now; but maybe God will be calling us to something more, to share in his anxiety in finding the lost and restoring them to God's company. **If we are working with God, our anxiety can be tempered with joy as we see people being connected to God.** It is the greatest joy as Jesus is expressing in these stories. There's nothing like it. To be part of that motivates the lives of the saints. But whatever our situation, if we understand Christ's message, there's always reason for hope, there's always reason for joy as God continues to do what he always does: shepherding his flock.