

About twenty years ago while pastor of another parish the sister of another parishioner requested I visit her brother in the hospital. While the sister faithfully practiced her faith, it had been a generation or more since her brother had set foot in the parish church. From what I had learned of the situation he had had a “falling out” with one of my predecessor pastors that had left him very angry and very bitter. I told his sister I would make a visit. Entering his hospital room, with his sister present, his face literally became purple with rage, and he ordered me out with language I had not even heard used during the summers I worked construction on the railroad! Encountering his embarrassed sister a couple of days later I remembered she told me that this man still had a picture of Jesus under the title of the “Sacred Heart” hanging in his bedroom. I suggested she take the picture and hang it in his hospital room where he could gaze at it. Since he believed the church and a priest had been unjust to him, perhaps the way to reconciliation would be through silent gazing at an image of Jesus. The sister did as I asked. A couple of days later she once again asked me to visit her brother since his condition had worsened and now death was imminent. I went back to the hospital having informed his sister that if sight of me unnecessarily agitated him in his condition I would leave the room and that God would take care of him. I walked into the room. His sister wakened him and told him I was there. I called his name and asked if he would like me to pray for him. Too weak to talk he nodded his head “yes.” I celebrated the sacraments of Penance and Anointing of the Sick with him. He died the next day. At his funeral I displayed the picture of the Sacred Heart that had been the means of God bringing him home.

The three parables in today’s gospel are illustrations of God in the guise of a shepherd, a housewife, a father in search of the lost. Most often overlooked is the middle parable, the woman diligently searching for the lost coin. Just as a sheep and a son are so valuable that they must be sought out when lost and celebrated when found, so is drachma (the value of the coin in the parable) whose value was enough to buy food to feed a family for the day. It is not a trivial bit of pocket change. The point is that just as the shepherd goes to extraordinary lengths to find the lost sheep, and the father goes

everyday to the end of the driveway to scan the horizon for any sign of his lost son, so the woman uses precious lamp oil and searches unceasingly under stubborn cobblestones in the floor until she finds where the errant coin has lodged. Shepherd, woman and father are all equally good images for God, who expends great effort to procure the return of the lost and who hosts an exuberant celebration in their honor.

This weekend our parish extends its annual invitation to all of us to prayerfully consider signing up to spend an hour of prayer before the exposed Blessed Sacrament in the Burke Chapel. Church tradition and recent Popes have all commended such a devotional practice to all of us. Personal testimonies that I have read attest to the grace that such presence and prayer before Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament have had in the lives of individuals or families. Like the brother of the woman I mentioned a few moments ago, individuals who for whatever reason had been alienated from God or the Church in as a “last ditch” effort decided to stop and pray before the exposed Blessed Sacrament and in that gazing either radically, or gradually as they felt themselves drawn back, experienced the grace of reconciliation with God and the Church. Testimonies also abound of people who like the shepherd, woman and the father diligently searched and interceded before Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament for a family member who had wandered off in some cases, were given the grace to witness their reconciliation with God and the Church. Just as gazing on an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was a means of divine grace for a man who had grown angry and embittered about life, the Church and God, how much more the reality of the living presence of the Risen Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament can be a source of strength, comfort, healing, peace, and reconciliation to all who turn and gaze on him with open eyes and open hearts. If you already are a regular participant in Eucharistic Adoration I encourage you to continue your practice. If you are not, here is an invitation to begin, or deepen, your relationship to Jesus.

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” In every Mass and in time spent in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, Jesus is here to seek and save us.