

Session Four · The Father Who Runs

The Lost Sheep · The Lost Coin · The Prodigal Son

WHAT WE FOUND

Three parables of things lost and found, rising to the greatest short story ever told. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine, the woman sweeps the whole house for one coin, and heaven throws a party over one sinner who repents. God does not wait passively for the lost; he searches.

Then the father, seeing his son “while he was yet at a distance,” runs, in that culture a shocking indignity for the patriarch of a household, and restores him before the boy can finish his rehearsed speech. The mercy is scandalous, and it is offered to both sons. The elder brother’s danger is quieter than the younger’s: to serve in the father’s house for years without ever receiving the father’s love.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) This is the justification of the ungodly: God seeks and restores the sinner who could not restore himself, and the initiative is entirely his.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407) The father’s running is scandalous mercy; he does not wait for the full apology but cuts it short with an embrace, a robe, a ring, and a feast.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897) Her “little way” is exactly this confidence: we come to the Father not as hired servants earning wages but as small children sure of a love we did not deserve.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) Penance is the whole person turning back to God (Summa Theologiae III, q. 85), and charity is nothing less than friendship with God (II-II, q. 23, a. 1). Read in that light, the elder son’s peril is service without friendship: duty that never becomes love.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. If you have been the prodigal in any area, name it specifically and consider going to confession before our next session. The walk home is what the parable describes; do not stay in the far country.
2. If the elder son’s portrait fit you anywhere, pray one sentence this week: “Father, all that is yours is mine. Help me receive it.” Say it not as a request but as a fact, and let your heart catch up.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Copy it out this week and carry it with you: **Luke 15:20**

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

One line, an image, or a question from tonight that you do not want to lose:

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read ahead: Luke 18:9-14 (the Pharisee and the Tax Collector) and Matthew 18:21-35 (the Unforgiving Servant).

Catechism: CCC 545, 1439, 1846