

Commentary to the Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time



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in Ordinary Time: There Are No Lost Souls

The man asked for an appointment, came into the priest's office and sat across from him. The priest didn't know the man. He had no idea why he wanted to see him. Was he looking to get married and inquiring about marriage procedures. Perhaps he was married? Were there problems at home, problems in the marriage or with children? Had he come to ask about entering the faith? "How can I help you?" the priest asked. The man just looked at the priest and shook his head. After a few minutes of silence, the man said, "Father, you are looking at a lost soul. I have done things, incredibly bad things throughout my life. My family wants nothing to do with me, and I don't blame them. I was married for twenty years and unfaithful for most of them. I didn't just cheat on my wife; I did everything possible to ruin her life. I haven't talked to my children in five years. The last thing I said to them was that I wasn't going to be their father anymore. Can you imagine saying that to children? I'm sure you can't. I send checks to support them, but I do it through the court system, and I only do what the law requires me to do. I have no real friends. I have plenty of former friends, whom I used to advance my career, or I used for whatever else I could get from them. You name it; I have done it. I'm despicable, and I know it. I have fought God at every turn of my life; making it very clear that I refused to let anything and anyone, including God, change my life. Father, I am a lost soul. I'm sure you want to throw me out of this office. But first, would you please just answer this question: Is there any hope for me?" Now, it would have been easy for the priest to say, "Look, why don't you just make a good confession, receive God's forgiveness and move on with your life." And the priest would eventually say that, but the priest realized that the man first needed to hear about God's forgiveness. So, he read for him this Sunday's Gospel, the story of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son.

Then he told the man, "Don't you realize, there are no lost souls in this life? Like, the shepherd who found his missing sheep, the woman who found her lost coin and the father who saw his son walking across the field coming back to him, God is bursting with joy when someone who has been lost is found. Don't you realize how excited God is right now that you are here in this office hoping that there is a slight chance you can be forgiven? Don't you realize that if he had to come down from heaven, become a man and be crucified just for you, He would?" And then the priest spoke to the man about what amends he could possibly make. The man broke down, cried, and said he'd do whatever he could. Finally, the priest heard his confession and welcomed him home. There are many people who think they are lost souls. Perhaps you know some of these people. We have a responsibility to let them know that they are not lost. There are many people who are convinced that their sins are so terrible that God would never forgive them. You may ask me, "Father, does anyone really believe that God would not forgive him or her?" Well, then, thank God, you haven't met people suffering the result of choosing an abortion for themselves or others. Many of them believe that they cannot be forgiven, even after they go to confession. There is a ministry called Project Rachel to help these people realize they are not lost. There are many of people who see no value to their lives. They have given up on themselves. They have gotten involved in various forms of immorality and have lost all sense of their own self-worth. Perhaps some of the people we know have given up on themselves as lost. We may be tempted to agree with them. They have hurt us and the people we love. But if we were to give up on them, we would be joining the devil in convincing these people that they are worthless. The destruction of self-esteem is the work of the devil. The work of the followers of Jesus Christ is to help others return to their rightful dignity as sons and daughters of God. Every family has its crazy uncles and aunts. Every family has its black sheep. We can deal with those who are eccentric.

We can look past their behavior, and we usually do, saying, "Uncle Bert doesn't have a whole lot of social skills," or "He has his ways, but underneath Uncle Bert's a really good person." We can deal with the crazy uncles and aunts, but it is difficult to deal with the black sheep. It is difficult to care for those who reject our families, our families' values, and who seem to be happy hurting others and themselves. But we cannot give up on them. We do not have that right to let them believe that they are lost souls. Maybe it's useless to talk to the family's black sheep. We may not be able to keep our doors open to them, their grievances might be such that we have to protect our immediate family. But we can keep the doors of our hearts open to them. We can pray for them. We have to. There is nothing worse we can say to someone than, "You are dead to me." What would our lives be like if we were to hear those words coming from God? But we would never hear these words from God. He refuses to give up the search for the lost sheep, the lost coin, or the lost son.

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