

Saint Luke Chapter Fifteen is devoted to three parables of our Lord: those of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. The last is known as “the parable of the prodigal son.” These three parables are as good as it gets for showing both the teaching style and Message of God Incarnate. It is the sinner in us that cannot believe the Good News. We tend towards believing we deserve something less. We are like the repentant son. “Make me one of your hired servants.” But here is the Divine Expert Who has come to us to convince us the highest personal relationship we know on earth (of a perfect father and a perfect son) is the closest approximation we can know to what God has designed for His relationship with each one of us.

The first two parables set up the third: they establish that a soul, *each* soul, is kept track of, and if it is lost a search is made for it. Why? Because it has value for the one who searches. This is true even though a lost sheep and lost coin cannot respond to or turn back to God. Neither one has initiative. Then comes the third parable, the story of the lost son. Like him, you and I have opportunity to respond to God. We can go out from Him or go to Him, as did the prodigal son. So Jesus reminds us in His parable that when repentance begins, and even *before* it begins, even before we turn to God, there is first of all a movement of the love of God. In anything we do towards Him, Almighty God has made the first move.

There is an early 20th Century English painting of an old man standing on the balcony of a home in the country. Dawn is breaking. It is early spring and there are no leaves yet on the trees. The old man is patiently and intently watching the farthest point on the road in the distance. When you look more closely you notice at his feet there is a lighted lantern. It is no longer needed in the growing light of dawn. But the lantern tells us the man has been watching since long before daylight. In the parable of the prodigal son Our Lord Jesus serves notice that this is His Father’s attitude towards every human soul. So many people, sometimes including you and me, go through periods of despair and torment. But the Gospel tells us that before the dawn breaks the Father has been watching the road. We must not forget that.

One of the most poignant moments in the Passion is when Peter, having denied Jesus, sees the Lord looking at him. There are fine art paintings of that moment too. The eyes of the two men meet. You and I can only image what Peter saw in

the Lord's eyes, filled as they were with the disappointment, grief, and gentle approach of Divine Love. Yet the Lord still knew where Peter would end up! There is another incomparably beautiful look sometimes seen on the blessed face of the Redeemer. It is seen by the angels in Heaven. This is the look of supreme joy over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine blessed saints who need no repentance. The lost sheep has returned to the fold, the lost coin is returned to the heavenly jewelry, the lost son returned to his father. And the Gospel Good News is that *I* could cause that look and *you could too*. We can so light up the radiant face of our beautiful Lord and Savior, with an act of deep repentance and contrition. And we can do that *because we have such a Lord Who is God*.