

REFLECTION

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It's when we decide to return to God after we fall, no matter how grave or ugly our fall is. This is what gives him the greater joy. In all those parables about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son narrated in chapter 15 of the gospel of St. Luke, the common conclusion is that there is "more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine who have no need of repentance."

God is never scandalized by any sin. He can take anything that our stupidity, that can have infinite possibilities, can produce.

He simply wants to forgive as long as the persons concerned also are at least open to forgiveness.

If he is happy already with creating us, and endowing us the best of things, he'd be happier still if after messing up his plan for us, we decide to go back to him. In this is shown the ultimate dimension of love and goodness, and together with it, wisdom and justice.

We have to learn to return to God as quickly as possible everytime we happen to find ourselves separated from him, even if the separation is regarded as slight. God never tires in forgiving us.

What Christ told his disciples to forgive one another not only seven times, but seventy times seven, meaning always, is first of all practiced and lived by him.

We have to be wary of our tendency to be overtaken by shame and fear because of the sins we commit. Let's not allow this misplaced sense of shame and fear to restrain us from returning to God as soon as we should.

Like the prodigal son, let's be both humble and courageous enough to acknowledge our helplessness and to go back to our Father God as quickly as we can. As seen in that beautiful story of the prodigal son, the father, who is the figure of God, readily accepted him and threw a big celebration for him, because he "was dead, and is back to life, he was lost, and is found."

We need to keep these parables of the lost sheep, lost coin and the prodigal son deeply embedded in our memory to reassure us of God's ever-ready mercy, and to avoid falling into the games and tricks of the devil who will always make use of our feelings and emotions to stir shame and fear in us.

And even if we have returned to God in some more or less definitive way, and yet continue to make some falls—hopefully not anymore very big or major falls, in spite of our best efforts—we can still count on God's endless mercy.

This is true even if we feel as if we are already abusing God's goodness and mercy for us. We just have to go back to him as quickly as possible. We should not waste time, entangled with our misplaced emotions.

God, who is ever so kind and merciful, will always give us all the chances we need to go back to him. Besides, we know that God allows certain bad things to happen to us because he wants us to learn a greater good from them.

It could be that he wants to strengthen our faith, hope and charity, or to enrich our temperance, fortitude and patience, or to give a more nuanced knowledge about ourselves, about others and

about the world in general. We know that many times a deeper knowledge is achieved by the mistakes we commit.

We should just learn to be sport and game in this life, an attitude that should spring from our complete trust in God's word and promises. We should be wary when we depend unduly on our feelings and our human estimations which, because they are very limited, often lead us to some dead-ends and short-circuits, and eventually to helplessness and despair.

This is what the devil likes. When we rely too much on our emotions and our human and worldly knowledge, we practically would be playing his game. Sooner or later, we would find ourselves cornered.

In a sense, we should be happy when we find ourselves in difficulties, or in some irregular or sinful situations, not because we are rationalizing them to be good, but rather because they are good occasions to trigger the great mercy of God for us.

God never abandons us. In fact, he gives more solicitous attention to us when we are in some predicament that alienates us from him. We should give him the greater joy of going back to him.