

The Ceramicist And Blacksmith

Once a ceramicist who was growing tired of his job came seeking the counsel of a very famous blacksmith and asked him the following, "I know you are a very famous and talented blacksmith. I have seen many works of art made by your hand, please tell me, what is the secret to your success? You always seem to have more customers than me." The blacksmith responds saying, "When I shape something and the final product is not perfect, I put it back into the furnace only to take it out again, hammer it with seemingly endless blows and I reshape it until I believe it to be perfect." He continued on, "But for you, when you make something using your clay and you do not get the result you want, you are quick to throw it away and grab another piece of clay. For this reason, you end up producing very little pottery bowls and vases. This is why you don't have many customers. This is why you feel as though you are not a success.

Today's Gospel reading is about the lost sheep. The Gospel says when the shepherd finds the lost sheep he truly rejoices over it to the point where it would seem he is not equally content with the ninety-nine that never went astray. According to church fathers, that very lost sheep was the human race that Christ came to save; save from our sinful life. Our Lord Jesus Christ while he was here on earth was continually in the pursuit of lost souls. He was seeking lost men and women, and it was for this reason that he went down among them, even among those who were most evidently lost, that he might find them. He took pains to put himself where he could come into communication with them, and he exhibited such kindness towards them that crowds felt almost compelled to just be near him. Christ told these crowds, all those years ago, that he was in fact seeking the lost, and wherever he should be found he will always be found seeking out the lost.

Just as about two thousand years ago Christ came to search for the lost sheep, so also today He has come in search for us. It is up to us to accept or reject this great offer of His love. It has never been an easy task to accept Christ's offer, since it demands spiritual courage. Moreover, acceptance means seeing ourselves for the sinful people that we are, people fallen from the lofty purpose of our creation—the purpose of reflecting His character in all its beauty, of reigning as His cherished kings and queens over this wonderful world. Acceptance means turning from our sins, confessing them to Him and finding the ready forgiveness His sacrifice won for us. It is not so much that we are trying to escape the punishment we deserve, but are responding in gratefulness and love to our incomparable God.

Today's parable of the shepherd searching in the dark, perilous mountains for a single lost sheep until he has found it and carried it safely home, sends a message of comfort that He Himself searches for us every day when we go astray. We need never to be afraid, for we are His sons and daughters and He will hear our cries and carry us to safety. But the question is, "Do we want Him to find us?" Are we ready to accept our faults and let Him work through our lives? In today's story, we see that the ceramicist continually got upset whenever he made a less-than-perfect pots. He would constantly throw them away and use

fresh pieces to try again. On the other hand, the blacksmith never got upset and worked hard to give life and beauty to the formless iron. Today, Christ came to find us, to restore within us His love, likeness and purity. It is time to accept his offer and be enlighten with His light. It is time to reflect and find our faults and confess them before God. It is time to reflect and see if we are devoid of His divine characters which should not be searched for outside of ourselves. Our spiritual restoration has to start from cleaning our hearts and minds. The blacksmith of today's story always succeeded compared to the ceramicist. When he could not get the result he wished to get he got right back to work and place the metal in the furnace and then worked even harder and ultimately, he ended up being pleased with the result.

Today, like two thousand years ago Christ is still in search of His beloved sons and daughters. Though the trials and battles of this life rage around us, in the midst of all that this world hurls at us we always have to be found nestled trustingly in the arms of our loving Savior. Since Christ is in search of us let us produce fruitful spiritual life and bear multiple fruits. Like the successful blacksmith, let us work hard and get spotless hearth and soul as God created each and every one of us. Let us accept His great offer of His love and ask Him to purify us and make us true servants of Him. Amen.