

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, September 11, 2022

The Grace of Indelible Value

Written by Br. John-Marmion Villa

Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Luke 15:1-32 Or Luke 15:1-10



An Excerpt from: [Spiritual Freedom: God's Life-Changing Gift by Fr. Dave Pivonka](#), published by Servant Books, Cincinnati.

"I remember one young woman who had gone through terrible struggles. She has lost her mother at a young age and had made choices that were very destructive. She had done things that she regretted, and she really had doubts about a God that loved, not to mention that she herself was lovable.

Jennifer and I met many times over several months, talking about her experience and her frustration with God. I invited her to be honest with God and to share her frustration and anger with Him. I told her that He was a 'big boy' and that He could take it. She did not have to hide her feelings from God, and she could freely share them with Him. And anyway, it wasn't as if God did not know what she was thinking or feeling anyways. I told her that God was deeply in love with her no matter what.

One time, she had been nervously playing with a penny she had found on the floor of my office during our meeting. A few days later, I received a letter from her. She wrote:

"I was thinking about that penny that I was playing with the whole time we were talking. Pennies go through a lot of 'stuff' too. They get passed from person to person, and dropped in the mud, and stepped on, but no matter how dirty and

beaten up they get, their worth stays the same. You know some pennies have an easy life because they are all shiny, but then you get the black ones, and you know they've been through a lot. It's just like people. Some of us are shiny and some of us are dirty and beat up, but we are all of equal worth and we are all loved. I feel like I'm one of those dirty pennies in the gutter, but you picked me up, brushed me off, and showed me that I have worth. You told me about a God who loves me and doesn't want to hurt me or be angry with me. For the first time, I'm starting to think that maybe that could be true ... for me."

I remember being so deeply moved by this story when I first read it that I've used it often when I've given talks around the country. A simple penny, overlooked as being insignificant monetarily, has much to teach us precisely because of its immutable value. Be it clean or dirty, it always has the same value: \$0.01.

In a world where value loses its meaning because it is oftentimes interchangeable based on circumstance or preference, the penny teaches us that value is not determined by choice or opinion. Value is assigned by the one with authority to confer it. Our value as humans is assigned by God Himself, that transcends personal preference or public opinion or any other human convention. It is a value not dependent upon our cooperation, our abilities, our status, our neighborhood, our ethnicity, our employment or education. It is His gift to us who bear the *imago dei* — the undefilable and unrepeatable Image of God within the very essence of our being.

Unfortunately, as Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas (OCA) has said, "the greatest danger in the modern world is the attack on man as the image of God. That God became man in order to unite man to God is the only sure Divine underwriting of human worth. We have value because of the image we bear." When God is no longer understood as a such, other human entities will jockey for its place. We have all been entangled in a complicated web of seductively marketed options perfectly suited to our preferences, with clever jingles, appealing graphics, scripted testimonials, fact-bearing notices, backed by experts and verified by popular demand, each claiming an authority to assign value to our lives.

It is the Christian's responsibility — our personal and ecclesial responsibility — to witness with the resplendence of our lives that God alone determines the value of human life. How can we do that?

[These all-too-famous parables from Luke's Gospel](#) have one thing in common: the intrinsic value of what was lost (the sheep, the coin, the younger son) causes a desperate search on the part of an 'owner' (the shepherd, the woman, the father) to begin to reclaim it at all costs. In other words, we know how precious our value is when we come to realize what drastic measures were spent to save what was lost, to restore what was utterly broken, to relieve what was oppressing, to empower what was hopeless ... in me! When we have come to experience the unfathomable richness of God's mercy and forgiveness in the face of our utter brokenness and inability to do His will apart from grace, it is then that we have come to realize our value in the eyes of God. Without recognizing and safeguarding that intrinsic value, I can certainly betray Jesus again and find myself entangled in that seductive web of sin all over again. Grace is real, but fragile and doubt is always closeby. Still, how amazing indeed is that "grace that saved a wretch like me. I was once was lost, but now am found; was blind but now I see."

PRAYER

Lord, Jesus Christ,
have mercy on me, a sinner.

Br. John-Marmion Villa