

NOVEMBER 6 2025 FATHER PETER JAE CHOI

The Pharisees and the Scribes were experts in the matter of Old Testament Scriptures, the Torah. Scribes were official copyists. They copied the Torah, the legal documents and various records by hand. They were not only scholars with expert knowledge of the Law, but also acted as legal experts. Pharisees, on the other hand, interpreted the scriptures, making it applicable to everyday life. They themselves were strict observers of the law. I am sure many of the Scribes and the Pharisees tried to do their very best to dedicate their lives to God, by learning the Torah and teaching others to do the same. Despite this, as recorded in the Gospels, Jesus clashed with them in public. Jesus criticized them for their hypocrisy, for selfishly drawing attention to themselves and for abusing their authority to benefit themselves. Another fundamental flaw they made in today's Gospel is that while they may have been much more virtuous and devout than others, out of pride, they judged the tax collectors and sinners and the actions of Jesus in their hearts. In doing so, they failed to show mercy and compassion which we all know is very dear to God. Do you remember when Jesus said, "I desire mercy not sacrifice!"

Of course, we often want instant justice. We want those who have wronged us brought to justice immediately and to our satisfaction. But the truth is we are all guilty. We are all in need of God's mercy.

Judgement is something only God can do because God alone knows the full story. In the meantime, God wants us to practice charity rather than justice. Mother Teresa reminded us of the need to show mercy when she said, "If you judge people, you have no time to love them."

Unfortunately, we can either judge or love someone. We can't do both. That's why Jesus said many times that He came for all of us sinners! His

mission was to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. That is why Jesus spent most of His earthly ministry tending to the needs of the people, like healing the sick, driving out demons, and calling people to repentance. Pope Francis said it so beautifully when he said the Church should be a field hospital, to care for the wounded, marginalized, and suffering in society. Jesus didn't establish headquarters in the centre of the city in a fancy building expecting people to come and see Him. Instead, He went to the peripheries and offered mercy, healing, and meeting them in the midst of their woundedness and their messy life. God knows all our problems and He comes to meet us where we are, not with condemnation and strict justice, but with mercy and love.

I remember hearing a story about a priest on the internet. His name is Fr. Goyo. He once told a beautiful story of mercy from his childhood that I would like to share with you. He grew up on a farm in a rural area in Spain. One day, he saw that his father was very upset, as he realized that a thief was stealing potatoes from his farm. So one day, his father hid himself and waited for the thief to come and steal potatoes, so he could catch the thief in the act and report him to the police. Fr. Goyo anxiously waited to see what his father would do once he caught the thief. Eventually running out of patience, he ran to the farm to see what was happening. To his surprise, he found his dad helping pick potatoes for the thief. He asked his dad, "Dad, what are you doing?" His dad replied, "I caught the man, but after speaking to him I realized that he has no job and no money. He has a family just like me. If I don't help him, his family will have nothing to eat. So I am helping him pick the best ones!" That was an important lesson that he never forgot! Instead of strict justice, his father showed mercy!

Just like the parable of lost sheep and lost coin, each of us is loved by God. We were not only created by God, but we also belong to God! If a child ever went missing, which parent wouldn't abandon everything to search for the child until the child is found? It is the same with God. There is nothing that God wouldn't do to get us back! There is no distance too far, no effort too great. God never gives up on us! That's why, unlike the Pharisees and the Scribes who wanted to have nothing to do with the tax collectors and sinners, Jesus went looking for them. Jesus wants all of us to take part in His mission of ministering the poor, the sick, and the broken hearted, by bringing them the Good News of God's love for them! Let me conclude today's homily with a story that illustrates what little we do, can make a difference in the lives of others.

Once upon a time there was a boy who was walking along the seashore. He noticed that a storm had washed thousands of starfish onto a beach, leaving them stranded on the sand. Realizing that if the starfish didn't return to the ocean soon, the scorching heat would dry them out and they would all suffocate and die, the boy began to pick up the live starfish one at a time, and threw them back into the ocean. An older man was observing the boy and asked him what he was doing. The boy replied, "I am trying to save these starfish by returning them to the ocean." The older man tried to discourage the boy by saying, "Do you see how long this beach is and how many starfish have washed ashore? It would be impossible for you to save all of them. I am sorry to tell you that you are not going to make a difference at all!" After a moment's pause, the boy picked up another starfish and threw it back into the sea. He then looked at the older gentleman and said "I did make a difference. I made a difference to that one." None of us can change the world. Only God is capable of doing that. But we all can do something, even if it's something small. We can help to change the life of someone today.