

Pastoral Message: March 27, 2022

We have been blessed this week with our parish mission, “Becoming a Pope Francis Church.” Bishop John Stowe, facilitating our scripture study for the weekend readings, invited us to think about in the story of the prodigal son who we see ourselves as? We had mothers and fathers who could relate to the Father’s love after having sons and daughters who at one time were lost but also had children that found their way home. We had prodigal son stories of those who could relate to fast living and hitting rock bottom but returning to the Father’s mercy. One person pointed out that Jesus could be an image of the prodigal Son who left his Father’s inheritance to spend it in mercy on prostitutes and sinners of all kinds. The elder son in the story represents those in religion who, in their superiority, do not like when we behave like Jesus and the company we might keep in forgiving and welcoming sinners like us. These are all great insights that people shared in our scripture study. Then Bishop John questioned who did we leave out in the story? Who were the unspoken persons? These were the servants. Bishop John pointed out that people who have been discriminated against or know the reality of slavery do not miss the servants in the picture. The insight was that there are people in our society that are often sadly looked at like the help, that often go unnoticed and seem unimportant. I once heard a wise leader who worked in the corporate world say that the person on the staff that should make the most money is the janitor. Yet not just financially, but even our attitudes. Do we, as a society, look down on these people? Bishop John reminded us that looking at the Gospel from the perspective of the servant is reading the scriptures from the margins. We may relate to different characters in this story which call us to conversion, and Jesus may relate to the prodigal son and how he squandered the Father’s love on us sinners. We should also remember though that he came to us like the servants in the story. He knew what it was like to be looked down upon and mistreated, and he knew what it was like to be poor and discriminated against, and he did this to lift people out of slavery and oppression. He came for all of us, but his mission was to the margins and a preferential option for the poor. May this synod challenge us to become more like Jesus, reaching out to prodigal sons and daughters, and lifting up those who oppressive systems try to hold down. May we be the church Pope Francis calls us to be, a poor church for the poor.