

Homily for 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Rachel was a teacher in a class with children with severe learning and emotional difficulties in an inner-city school. Her most difficult charge was ten-year-old Kyle, the son of a drug-addicted mother, a boy with permanent scars along the side of his left arm from a beating with an extension cord when he was three. Kyle was given to angry, violent outbursts and to running away.

Rachel had planned a field trip for her students. But because of his behavior issues, Kyle would remain at school. Kyle flew into a rage, screaming, cursing, spitting...and then he did what he always does...he ran away. He dashed out the door, straight into the heavy morning traffic...and Rachel ran after him.

With no sense of what she would say or do once – and if – she caught up with him, she continued to chase after him. Finally exhausted after several blocks of running, Kyle stopped. He looked up and saw his teacher running toward him. He calmed down; his anger subsided. Rachel and Kyle locked eyes. Rachel willed every ounce of compassion and understanding in her heart toward him.

That moment changed him. When Kyle returned to school several weeks later he was a changed student. He was glued to Rachel's

side and attempted to do all his work. But what made the difference? That was the question that Rachel posed to the school psychologist. The psychologist placed her hand on Rachel's shoulder and said: "Rachel, no one ever ran after him before. No one. They always just let him go."

If you want to understand the meaning of the parable of the Prodigal Son, look to the story of Rachel and Kyle. For as Rachael ran after Kyle, so does the Father run after the Prodigal Son. And as the Father ran after the Prodigal Son, so does God run after each one of us.

How often do we run away from God and seek our own agendas, our own pleasures, our own desires? How often do we find ourselves frustrated and locked in a world of confusion? How often do we even feel lost? And when those moments happen, the parable teaches us that all we have to do is "turn" toward God and God who is our Father will run toward us and bring us home...a home that we find in God's love embracing our hearts and our lives.

And when we have been embraced by God, God begs us to run to those we have hurt and with those who have hurt us...to "run" and begin healing the brokenness and help bridge the divisions that prevent us from realizing the love of God that is always in our midst...that is always in the love and presence of our sisters and brothers.