**17 Pentecost, Sept 15, 2013; Jer 4:11-28, Ps, 14,1 Tim 1: 12-17, Luke 15: 1-10, The Rev. Mary S. Trainor**

I have worn contact lenses most of my life, and there have been many early mornings, while racing to be on time for work, that I have lost one. Then, try to find a contact lens when you can't see! So, with help, when I do finally find the lens -- oh my, the joy that I experience is huge!! We all can relate to losing things of value to us, and when we manage to find what we have lost -- we are appreciative. In today's Gospel Jesus tells two parables, called the "lost and found parables." The first is about a lost coin and the second about a lost sheep, both of great value, and both sought with extraordinary effort by the one who lost it. Then the joy came! Jesus said: `***Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' `Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost***.' These are really the joy parables -- sheer joy experienced when the lost has been found. The word "joy" appears 145 times in the Bible. To be joyful means much more than being happy, or smiling. To have joy means to be in a settled state of contentment, confidence and hope. Joy is something that God wants us to have. Joy is something God gives us when we find Him, when we allow Him to find us.

Each of us, without God, is a lost sheep. Day after day, week after week, year after year, God is there looking for us, waiting for us. God never gives up on us; He is there for us in spite of our attempts to hide from Him, in spite of our attempts to ignore Him, in spite of our efforts to get lost in the crowd. God never gives up on us.

True story: It was May 7, some years back, when a man named Roger was hitchhiking home after having been discharged from the army. A man in a black Cadillac picked him up. The driver, whose name was Hamilton, was on his way to a business meeting in Chicago -- Roger's home was right on the way. Roger, a Christian, got a nagging sense that he was supposed to share his faith with this man. He put it off until it was only 30 minutes from his home, and so he figured now was the time. Then, Roger told Mr. Hamilton about what God meant to him, about Jesus' plan of salvation and then asked Hamilton if he would like to receive Jesus as his savior and Lord.  The businessman pulled the car over, bowed his head, asked Roger to pray for him to receive Christ, and then thanked him profusely. He dropped Roger off, and life went on. One day, five years later, Roger found an old business card in a suitcase - the card was Hamilton's card. When in Chicago on business soon afterwards, Roger dropped by Hamilton's business. The receptionist told Roger that it was impossible to see Mr. Hamilton, but he could see Mrs. Hamilton. A little confused, he was ushered into a beautiful office where he found himself facing a keen-eyed woman in her fifties. She extended her hand "You knew my husband?"  Roger told her about how Hamilton had picked him up while he was hitchhiking home after he was discharged, on May 7 five years before. Then, he mention that he had shared the message of Jesus with her husband and so he was curious about how Mr. Hamilton had lived out his faith after that. Explosive sobs shook her body. Finally she said, "I had prayed for my husband's salvation for years."  Roger asked, "Where is your husband?" Mrs. Hamilton said, "He was in a car crash after he let you out of the car that day, and died. I am crying with joy now because I had given up on God, after he died, thinking my prayers had not been answered. But now I see God never gave up; I was so wrong!" Mr. Hamilton, on May 7, was found and there was great rejoicing. God sent Roger on a mission that day, and fortunately Roger listened to the Holy Spirit.

Hamilton was like many of us in this culture, of non-commitment. People want to keep their options open---making a commitment sounds boring -- being found by Jesus might require something of us. Fortunately, God made a commitment to us, and lives into that commitment; He never ever gives up on us, His hand is always outstretched to us, always ready to pull us out of the ditch we find ourselves in. God is waiting for you to come to Him with all your heart, mind, soul and strength -- don't hold back. A lot of people think they have will have time later in their lives to get more serious about their faith, but the truth of the matter is that none of us know if we will have a "later."

God wants you to experience the joy of the Lord. And, God rejoices when you make this discovery, when you take His outstretched hand that finds you (no matter what is going on in your life)! In a few minutes, you have an opportunity to come forward and stretch your hand out to receive Jesus: in the Holy Eucharist. In the process of doing this, you are allowing yourself to be found by God -- you are presenting yourself as once lost and now found.....and the result is pure joy.

Today's opening prayer, found in your bulletin insert, captures today's message. Let us pray it together:  **God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.**