

Once there was a pasture near the edge of a forest. Shepherds of the nearby villages came there with their flocks of sheep. While the flocks grazed, the shepherds spent their time reading & napping, and taking their turn watching after the sheep.

Now, there was a big old tree at the end of the pasture. It had a big hollow but with a narrow opening to get in. The shepherds always put their lunch bags in the hollow. At noon, they took them out and enjoyed their mid-day meals together.

One day a hungry fox happened to come that way out of the forest. He got the scent of the lunch bags – and followed the scent to reach the hollow.

His belly was sunk inside owing to hunger – so, he was able to get into the hollow without much difficulty – and there he ate his fill of the shepherd’s lunches.

The problem came when the fox tried to get out of the hollow in the tree – for he had eaten so much – he was now too big to get out. . .

The moral of the story is not to eat more than you really need – or, I guess, – be careful of tight places.

Never eat more than you really need . . . I’m sure none of us have EVER been in that situation. .

Or drinking more than we need to . . .

Or spending more than we need to . . .

Or working more than we need to. . .

I think the Gospel lesson for today is that those human excesses – overeating, overdrinking, overspending, overworking, overmedicating --- are **always** harmful and --- difficult to overcome.

BUT DIVINE EXCESSES are always life giving:

--forgiveness (without counting the cost),

--mercy (without limit),

--love (without bounds),

--care (without recompense),

--life (beyond death).

Jesus says, “be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” I think others see in us the perfection of God when we personify the excesses of God. For example:

-- when we stop for the 100th time to answer a child’s question.

--when we continue to smile at a coworker who never smiles back.

-- when we give to someone in need without being asked.

--when we show kindness not only to our neighbors -- but our enemies as well.

--when we go beyond just a minimum of service hours that might be required for school, scouts, business, or Confirmation.

Human excesses are always harmful and difficult to overcome.

Divine excesses are always life-giving --- and can become easier – the more we practice them.

In this way, our righteousness will surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees – and we shall become Holy – just as the Lord our God is holy.