Each Wednesday I try to spend the morning visiting our parishioners who are hospitalized. It's usually not too difficult, but this was one of those weeks when we had four sick parishioners who went to four different hospitals. So I told each of them, you know you could make this a lot easier on me if you all went to the same hospital and got rooms on the same floor. Preferably near ground level, on the parking lot side of the building. One of them is Bill Bauer, whom many of you know. Bill's been over at KU Med Center. Actually we don't have parishioners at KU very often, so I was amazed again walking in there how expansive that facility is. It looks like they deliberately designed it to make it inconvenient for you to get from the street to the room you wish to visit. They charge you for parking, so last week I asked about a clergy parking pass, which they were happy to provide, along with this map. There are several possibilities where they allow me to park. The trick was to find the lot, find the entrance to the lot, find which part of the lot is open to clergy parking, find an open parking space in that lot, or start looking for a different lot, and then find your way back to the main entrance of the hospital where you finally start looking for the room you wish to visit, and that's another whole story. I found the bookstore, the cafeteria, the auditorium, the dumpsters, the candy machine, three entrances, and six nurses stations before I found Bill. And he was asleep. So when the Gospel today gave me several examples of losing a sheep, losing a coin, and losing an inheritance, I knew just what it was like to lose my way.

We have an expression in English about this. We say, "I got lost." It's a convenient expression because it makes it sound like it wasn't my fault. Like I got lost because of the hospital, or because the signs were bad. But the truth is that most often when we get lost, it's just our own durn fault. Maybe that shepherd wouldn't have lost his sheep if he had been doing his job. Maybe that woman wouldn't have lost her coin if she had put it where it belongs. Maybe the son wouldn't have lost his inheritance if he hadn't been so foolhardy. Maybe I wouldn't have lost my way if I had read the map more carefully.

I expect this is why Jesus says God is so happy when the sinner returns. The repentant sinner is usually someone who realizes that he or she is not just a victim who "got lost", but someone who is responsible as well. A repentant sinner is someone who can move from saying, "I got lost," to someone who can say, "I lost my way; I did it." It's easy to blame our parents, to blame our addictions, to blame our friends and co-workers for who we've become. And it's true they all had a hand in it. But there's a point at which it helps to say, "OK, I'm responsible for this one." This is why God gets happy. It's not just that what was lost is found, but that the one who lost his or her way admitted it and turned around.