

The prodigal son Luke 15:11-32



“But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”

It is worth, and so much so, to live one more year, until the end of times and thereafter, in order to listen again to the parable of the prodigal son spoken to us today. And to learn new things about how much human life returns to the bosom of the Father, to receive, not his rightful reward, but his dignity through a personal embrace. Forgiveness, the peace of the resurrection, is granted to every weary soul who remembers the fatherly love.

Because there is nothing more human than this story and nothing that can reflect on us more mercy but what we hear today. Because mercy needs to be, as it is, personal. It knows you and it waits for you, even when you are dead. It embraces and kisses the sinner. It has nothing bad to say about you (as Madison observed on Friday). But it rejoices when he sees us from very far. And he comes ahead to encounter us, knowing who we are, and forgiveness makes the tears flow. By receiving our confession, he will grant more than what we lost. It touches you and speaks with kindness both to the one that is ready to receive mercy and to the one who is full of anger.

As human beings, we identify with one or the other of the brothers. And it is good to do so, because it gives us a map of forgiveness for the soul. And yet, in the story the one who loves finds himself alone. He lives through rejection and betrayal not once but twice. He does not complain and says nothing about his pain. He can never fully rejoice, even when one soul repents - that's why it is the angels who rejoice in heaven (Luke 15:10) - not the Father. Because he always has his heart at least half broken. Joy does not enter his heart without making another mark of sorrow. He is the place where brothers can return and dwell. His heart has no limits when it comes to love. And it changes like the heart of a child. The only thing that moves man to repentance, that sets in motion the sinner, the only thing that can “help” one change is his steadfast love. “Be still and know

that I am God” (Ps 46:10), in order for your heart to see my compassion, to receive my touch that heals any wounds.

The parable reveals to us the foundations of life. The revelation of the person. The encounter and hospitality of the Father. His love for his son, who is a sinner today. The love that is so great that only the one who found humility is able to receive it. Only the one that found out how much he has wasted is able to accept that he is loved, without being turned to anger.

A word for us for Lent, from a prodigal son who knows in his heart forgiveness:

This week M. appeared again to the mission, as he has been doing every now and then over the years. He is losing the battle with addictions by day and by night. The miracle is that when he comes to visit us, he is still alive. There could not be a clearer prodigal son than him in Toronto, who survived so many winters, who knows the abyss of abandonment that surrounds you with noise and accusations. The prodigal son finds himself abandoned, but not alone. With many voices that accuse him, that make his broken life a hell. M. went through all that and somehow overcame it all. His heart is free even though his body is tormented. On Thursday he spoke about the culture that keeps him captive here, that keeps all of us, that flattens the soul, that mortifies and paralyzes your spirit with comfort, so you cannot fight. A picture of the time we live today. A sense of fatalism. A circle that closes slowly on you by day and by night, with no haste. “But you see, that's why we have to fight it. We have to, because it is God who gives us hope every day.” And as he says this, M. asks if he can go to the chapel to pray. And he lives for prayer.

We find ourselves at times either older and bitter or young and foolish. In both cases, we seem to care more about ourselves, more than about anything else. And yet, despite all this, we are able to enter daily into the very reality of the intimacy between the prodigal son and the Father. We are welcome within the encounter of love that forgives and the daring heart that repents. We can feel the joy of resurrection and the intimacy of peace that the Father shares with the son. We are allowed to experience all this by listening to and being invited every day within the community by M. and many others like him. Because M. came within his heart to the knowledge of fatherly love and he does not keep

it for himself. The Father spoke to him and he listened. We are witnesses of this love experienced within the heart by a human being, which sets him in motion, stirring his soul. Even if we might not have this love within us, like the older brother, the knowledge of it is shared with us with gratuity because it is a moment of grace. Even if we cannot partake of it within our own heart, the proximity to the prodigal son who knows our Father makes us included within the filial love. It is a gift that calls us to find out within our own heart the engravement of this love. To be set in motion. So we don't only remember but come forward to be embraced and restored, to love the Father more than our own life, to love God for who God is. Lile M. does, beyond his unhealing illness.

Community reflection on today's gospel:

The Sunday Gospel-Sunday of the Prodigal Son.

While the father freely grants his younger son all his inheritance, his worldly inheritance, without question, without it seeming to be a test, but out of his father's deep love for his son, his son's inheritance was truly that of free will.

Again, not a test by the young man's father, however it was a test, a temptation, a muddying of his heart and soul, the foolishness of youth, a heeding of the lying promises of the evil one.

And this young man, blinded by squandering his inheritance, that is, Eternal Life, only came to his senses when he realized how he had wasted, denied, spoiled his gift of this Eternal True Inheritance, far from the molten engraved unseeing, unhearing, unwalking, and unspeaking false idols, which the devil and all his demons exclaimed joyfully, with their, "Well done! Well done!" as he found himself alone and hungered.

He was so hungry, he craved the food of the swine.

And the swine were selfish and gleefully denied him even these scraps of rotten food.

These swine, as those who, as in the Gospel, Jesus cast out of the tormented man, allowing them to enter a herd of swine, which had them all go over a cliff to drown in the sea, were terrified at how they knew they had no choice but to obey Christ.

For the devil, and his scraps of food, meant for all those who are starving after turning to him, giving over his true inheritance to him, were even denied the starving young man, when the devil was threatened and angered at knowing how the young man's heart was being starved-starved for his father, that is, his one True Father, and the True Inheritance, which unlike lack of rain for abundant crops, requires only the thirsting, for True Food, Food for the Spirit, the great rains of repentant tears.

So, when the son returns to his father, hungry, (as the devil only wants to starve us of Life Everlasting, tricking us to believe we have all we need, and none of it is to share, the lie that his merry making, his greed and lusts of things which are soul destroying, a bargain, as when he tried to tempt Christ in the desert for 40 days) and head held in shame, fearing his father would be so angry he would turn him away, he meekly, with gratitude, and the returning of the love for his father's forgiveness and mercy, enveloped by the great feast of celebration in his honour.

The father's eldest son, baffled and angry with his father, jealous of his brother, insists he deserves no forgiveness, no fatted calf.

The father still loves his eldest son, appreciates how hard he has toiled for him, but gently instructs him in his hardened heart (Now also in danger of being tempted by the devil, with jealousy, anger, and resentment of his brother) that his younger brother deserved to be received back with great joy and love and indeed a great feast, True merry making.

So it is with all of us.

Those of us who toil obediently for The Lord, make the mistake that this alone will grant us our Eternal Inheritance.

And certainly God loves the righteous, but as Jesus says in the Gospel, "I did not come to save the righteous, but the sinners."

So, if those of us who do our best to live by the Gospel, and try hard not to stray, however sin ourselves in judging others whom have strayed and squandered this One True Inheritance, and not share in the rejoicing of our lost brother who returns to God, to abandon earthly riches and dark pleasures, we too are squandering our True Inheritance, our obedience being as that of the blinded Pharisees.

Cain killed his brother Abel for this very reason.

We are not above one another, we ought to encourage one another in living by example, but in love for the lost sinner, even, and perhaps most of all for the unbeliever.

We pray for them, we forgive them, we love them.

As the poor woman who gave her last two coins as a tithe, while the rich thought their gifts were sure to let God find high favour with them, rather than she, it was Christ who said that this woman gave all she had in her faith, and her true abiding quiet love for God.

And as well as Scripture tells us, certainly all we do for the sake of The Lord will have us receive our reward, but it is those who have the least to give, and do, with humility and love God will grant His Grace to.

So it was with the prodigal son- He returned to his father with “a broken spirit, and a contrite heart, which God does not despise”, because that was all he had left.

And that he was destitute, not only for the material, but for the longing in his heart for his father’s love and mercy, hungry for the True Food of The Spirit, he was received back into the fold.

And the demons were shrieking then as they were forced out his soul, while they tempted then his brother.

The Feast is Communion, which the prodigal son approached with his knowing how unworthy he was, but gratefully accepted, and was bathed in the love of his father and all with him, sharing in this Feast, also sharing in this joy. And the Angels were present, rejoicing as well, through the hymns of praise and thanksgiving offered to God for his love and mercy of His lost sheep.

So to it ought to be for us, to love those who have been deceived, fallen away, have lost faith, lost hope, but return to The Father.

The Father always loves us, and the Mother of God and the Saints are praying for us all to be called to repentance, and then through his loving kindness,

grants us too this great Feast, which we all approach, unworthy, and, “On behalf of all, and for all.”

By Elisha



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