

Some time ago, a father was asked by his youngest son, 19 years old, for permission to use his car to go to a nearby town with his friends for a disco. He promised his father that he would drive very carefully and would not drink. In the past he had sometimes come home drunk. However, this time he was true to his word regarding the drink but the car, a Mercedes, was powerful and he wanted to show off to the friends and drove at speed whilst they cheered him on. Suddenly the car went out of control. Luckily, none of them was seriously injured but the car was totaled. On his way home in a taxi, he was scared to meet his father as he expected the worst, especially as his mother and siblings had warned the father not to give him the car. To his amazement the father threw his arms around him and hugged him warmly, telling him whilst they could never replace him, they could always replace the car.

The parable of the prodigal son is a parable of inspiration. It is one of those stories that we experience in our families. The parable revolves around three characters: [The Stubborn Rebellion of a Sinful Son](#), [The Angry Reaction of a Selfish Brother](#), and [The Sweet Reception of a Sympathetic Father](#), who loves them both. The other day I saw a message on Facebook; *"I am tired of paying rent. I am moving to a Church since it is my father's house."* We are all paying rent to Satan if we are in sin. We can live in our father's house free of sin.

The journey back was a sad, lonely, and fearful one. Isn't it easy to come back home when you are a hero laden with trophies and glory? But the prodigal son had no trophies to show to his father with which to earn his praise, welcome and love. He was coming home empty-handed. Worse, he was coming home laden with shame and disgrace. What happened? When the father saw his son coming towards him, his heart went out to him and the next minute they were in each other's arms. The father did not just accept him back. He welcomed him back. All was forgiven.

The biggest discovery the son made was that he was loved in his sins. The father never stopped loving him. It does not do that much good to be loved in one's goodness. But it is an extraordinary experience to be loved in one's sinfulness. This is what grace is all about. Those who have experienced this type of love, like Saint Augustine, or John Newton, know something about the heart of God.

We could never have known God's incredible love and forgiveness for each of us if Jesus had not come to reveal and model it. *God's forgiveness is not a cold, half-hearted forgiveness but a warm and heartfelt one.* God just does not only forgive us; he loves us and lets us know it. The story does not give us a license to sin. But for those of us who have sinned and badly this story is a very great consolation. Our past can be overcome. We can make a fresh start. This is the great lesson of the parable.

God is extravagant. He is extravagant in his love and mercy towards us. He comes to meet us as we are, sinners, often so undeserving of his love. Yet he comes to us to lead us to a terrific feast in heaven, the foretaste of which is the Eucharist. This is what we heard in our first reading from the book of Joshua. Jesus is trying to help us to a unique way of looking at God. We have been brought up with the idea of a **profit and loss God**. That is, if we are good, we will be rewarded and if we do bad, we will be punished. This is difficult to reconcile with today's parable.

Jesus met the elder son in the Pharisees and lawgivers of his day, many of whom were locked into their own conviction that they were right and knew the way to earn God's acceptance and a place in his kingdom. They thought they had rights over God and guarded him jealously. Jesus understands these people too and tried his best to get them to come to know God as he really is, but they were too set in their ways and finally got rid of him because he was too disruptive, according to their way of thinking.

Who is the God I believe in? Is it the prodigal father Jesus describes for us today? Or a punishing God the Pharisees proclaimed? In the second reading, St. Paul invites us to be ambassadors of the newness of the message of Jesus, of a God who has a feast prepared for us. Will we be ambassadors of this good news or ambassadors of a false God of fear and sanctions?

Which of the two sons in the parable do I identify most with, the younger son or the older one? There is part of each in me? *We are all sinners*. Whether our sins are more visible like those of the younger son or more hidden like those of the elder son, the message for us today is that we all need to stop paying rent to Satan, return to the father's house.

God Bless You.