

Fourth Sunday of Lent 2019

My beloved brothers and sisters, the Gospel story is one of the best known and beloved of all the Gospel Parables that Jesus gave us. We call it the Prodigal Son; the word: Prodigal, means to spend money lavishly, or with abandon. However, it can also mean, giving something on a lavish scale. The question must be asked: is this Gospel about a wayward and selfish son; or, is it about a Father, who loves so unconditional, that he lavishes his love on the wayward son? I think Jesus would say it is about the Father's lavish love for all of us wayward sons and daughters! That is why there are two children in the story!

Jesus tells this story in response to the Pharisees, whose very name means: The righteous ones. They were often like the older brother in the story, and were often angry at Jesus for His treatment of public sinners. They were arrogant, like the oldest son, whose heart was like a rock, and who avoided sinners rather than trying to call them back into God's forgiving and loving embrace. Yet, the whole history of Israel, is about the God of Israel who never gives up on His beloved people and always calls them back into His embrace! The problem with the Pharisees is often our problem as well: we have hardened hearts. We avoid recognizing our own infinite need of God's mercy, because we avoid seeing the reality of our sin. We avoid coming to the infinite fountain of God's mercy, and so we do not live in the fullness of His mercy and extend His Divine Mercy to others around us! This story, is a portrait of God's infinite mercy and love, and His call to us, to receive it, and live it for others!

It is God, who is always taking the first step to call us into His mercy: The father in the story, was always seeking the return of his wayward son. We know this because, while the young son was a long ways off, he saw him and ran to him, and before the young man could finish his spiel- he command his servants: "quick get a new robe for him, get a new ring for him, and new sandals for his feet." He does not treat the young man like a slave, but like a prince who will inherit his kingdom!

My brothers and sisters, most people doubt God's infinite love and mercy for them- this is the work of the Accuser of the Brethren, the Devil, who wants us to

wallow in his own despair. We give up striving to be the beloved ones, striving to return the love of God, because we believe that we can't ever be saints, so why try? We look at our sinfulness, our failures and our weaknesses and doubt that God is really, truly merciful for us, so why go to confession, we're just going to sin again anyway! We think His mercy is out of reach, and so we often put ourselves out of reach. We need to remember that the Father went running out to His son, and, He went out to the arrogant older son- because that is the nature of our God! That's the meaning of the Incarnation and Jesus' coming to us. God has loved us first and foremost! Confession is the work of God reaching out to us, not to punish and destroy or to humiliate, but to beckon and to embrace us and love us! That's why we need to go to God, in Confession often! This Tuesday, come with an expectant heart, God will do all of the rest! Amen! Amen!