

A Loving Father

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Fourth Sunday in Lent) is Luke 15:1-3, 11-32. The Jewish leaders do not want to hear Jesus' message of a call for repentance. So he tells three parables, all dealing with the love of someone not giving up on a lost sheep, coin and a prodigal son (the parable of our lesson).

The setting is that of sinners drawing near to Jesus like flies to honey. This was so because Jesus had been preaching and teaching the good news of salvation. The Jewish leaders on the other hand had laid layer upon layer laws on the people and the people had been totally overwhelmed.

The parable often known as "The Prodigal Son" could be much more likely be entitled "The Loving Father."

The younger son hurls one insulting behavior after another all directed at his father (represents God). When the younger (prodigal) says "*give me* (v. 12) he is saying "I want to get out and away from you, an insulting demand." When he asks for the father to: "*share of property*" (v.12) he was asking for the father's death. The lowest point comes when he *hired himself*" (v. 15) to work with pigs. This was totally repugnant to Jewish laws.

The older son is equally insulting to his father. He dubiously accuses his younger brother of wasting his money on prostitutes. He accuses his father of favoritism and he refuses to do his duty when it comes to giving feasts.

The father on the other hand is nothing but loving forgiveness. When the younger son hit bottom he knew that his father would not taunt him or say, "I told you so." He had a pleasant memory of home and his father. The father had compassion on his son even when he was a long way off. Compassion here means to have bowels yearning. It is also used in Good Samaritan story.

The father holds a feast and totally brings the younger son back within the community. He restores the younger son fully by the gifts he gives (best robe, ring, shoes and fatted calf). Slaves did not wear shoes. A fatted calf was only served when royalty was involved.

The father addresses the older son in the most loving term for a child. In case of the older son's passive aggressive accusations, the father reminds him that he has always had the father's full love and concern. The father reminds both sons that his grace is free and cannot be earned.

At some point in our life we are the prodigal as well as the older son. God found us when we were far from Him. His loving forgives will always be there for us. The many mercies he exhibits for both of his sons will always be available to us not matter the circumstances.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, thank you this comforting parable. Thank you for forgiving us when we stray and constantly reminding us of you loving forgiveness. Amen