

## **Second Sunday of Lent - The Prodigal Son**

Every Sunday during the Lenten Season has a unique name. Today is known as the Sunday of the Prodigal Son. Accordingly, the lesson of the day comes from the Gospel of St. Luke, Chapter 15, where Jesus teaches using a parable, commonly known as the story of the Prodigal Son.

Perhaps if nothing else reached us from the time of Jesus except for this one parable, it would be enough to explain our relationship with God. It is a story of reconciliation, and expresses the unconditional love that God has for us and therefore, requires of us.

The story of the Prodigal Son unfolds like this: A man has two sons. The younger son asks for and receives his inheritance. He takes his share of his father's estate and squanders it on reckless living. While he has funds, he is popular with many friends. But when his money ran out, so did his friends. No money, no parties, no extravagant lifestyle, no friends, he goes out to look for work. But it is of no use. He can't make enough to survive.

One night, when he is really down, he sees some pigs feeding and he actually considers eating the pigs' food because he is so hungry. It is at that point that he comes to his senses. He remembers his father's home and remembers that that his father's servants live better than he. That night, he makes a decision to go back home –to his father – to beg for forgiveness. He even strategizes that he will ask to be taken-in as one of his father's servants.

Now, while the son is returning home his father sees him on this road. His father comes running toward him, grabs him, hugs him and kisses him. He doesn't even give his son a chance to talk nor to explain his deeds while away from home. The father then orders his servants to come around and bring him the best clothes and put the ring of authority on his hand. Then he orders a celebration! The fatted calf is slaughtered for this party.

The story of the Prodigal Son doesn't end here. Remember he had an older brother. Now this older brother was working in the field and heard the sound of merriment and dancing. He didn't understand and protested to his father. He said, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!" He just could not understand the unfairness of life. He (the older brother) had done everything right and the younger brother had wasted his inheritance. "Where is the justice?" he demanded. Why is the bad guy getting rewarded while the good guy continues to labor and struggle?

The father, with compassion and understanding, explains to the older brother, "You are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

So ends the story of the Prodigal Son, but here begins a tremendous opportunity to reflect on the many dimensions of this short parable.

In the next few days of the Lenten Journey we will look at the father and older son characters separately. For today's discussion we will focus on the younger son. Let's begin with the young man's desire to want a better life and to enjoy it. That is not a foreign or unusual feeling. In fact, we all have entertained thoughts of better life. Why not? Why shouldn't we have the better things in life? For in fact, in this boy's case, he had the means, his father had the resources, so why not take advantage of the situation and go for it all? What then is the "sin" of the younger son? He is driven by his passions and the energy that comes with youth, and perhaps a little bit of impatience. He seizes the opportunity and takes what he can! Where's the sin?

Taking what is given to you is not a sin. That is your gift. It belongs to you. The sin is squandering the gift! The sin is taking your gift and abusing it.

One of the challenges that comes to us on this 14<sup>th</sup> Day of the Lenten Journey is to list and inventory the gifts that have been given to you. Are you using that gift? Or are you abusing it? Are you respecting that gift or are you squandering it?

God has given each of us talents. He has given us life itself. Indeed the breath we breathe is a gift, as is the smile on our face, our ability to hug and our passion to reach out. Unfortunately, much like the Prodigal Son, we squander what is given us in a reckless and sometimes abusive manner. We consume our lives with the minutia and we therefore abandon quality. God has given us a smile that would light up a room and we cover it up, we are ashamed to show that smile. He has given us the ability to talk and instead we keep our mouths closed, or if we do open it we fill it with idle conversation and gossip. He has given us the ability to hold, lift up and to help others instead we tie our hands down and refuse to help those in need. He has given us feet to walk in the paths of righteousness and instead we take our bodies to dismal hangouts.

We are each a prodigal son. We have taken the gifts of God and instead of using and enjoying them, we have squandered, abused and wasted the goodness in a prodigal life. We have missed the mark and by missing it, we fall short of realizing and maximizing our potential.

As we are inventorying our talents and gifts from God, let us also ask ourselves how we are using those gifts. Are we squandering the precious elements of life? Or are we using those talents for the betterment of all?

Tomorrow, we will continue with the parable of the Prodigal Son by observing the character of the father. For now let us pray the prayer of St. Nerses Shnorhali *Heavenly Father, true God, who sent Your beloved Son to seek the wandering sheep. I have sinned against heaven and before you. Receive me like Prodigal Son and clothe me with the garment of innocence, of which I was deprived by with sin. Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me a great sinner. Amen (3/24)*