

The Sunday of the Prodigal Son

(St. Luke 15:11–32)

The features that have been mentioned as being characteristic of the previous two Sundays, namely happiness and its loss, are repeated also by this Sunday. The sole idea of this Sunday is the ascension; man's rise from fall and his return to the place from where he was expelled. This Sunday and the two Sundays following it take their names from the main parables included in the lections of those days.

According to the central parable of this Sunday, the "younger son" of a happy family desires to leave his father's home for a far country. As Adam and Eve, so also this young man was not satisfied with what he had enjoyed. In other words, this boy does not know and consequently cannot appreciate the value of what he owns and therefore he wishes after the pleasures of a "far-country."

One of the tragedies of human life is the fact that a man does not appreciate the valuable heritage he possesses and enjoys unless he loses it. All of us may have the same experience regarding our health, our position, or our beloved ones. Thus, only after losing his sight, a person can understand how essential an organ his eyes were. The very death of a beloved one proves to us how vital was his presence. The same is also true for the spiritual values. Only after losing your innocence you feel how sweet it had been, about which perhaps you had never given a thought to. And it is under such circumstances that one can notice the goodness of evil. By this we partly understand the cause of the existence of evil itself, allowed (or even destined) by Providence and making reference to its beneficial role.

The Prodigal Son lost almost everything he had — riches, beauty, and honor. He had willingly lost the presence of a father and the sweetness of a home. He who had started his expectations to obtain a better life found himself in dire poverty and in the company of swines. All these miseries, however, made it possible for him to find the most important thing, that is, the appreciation of what he had enjoyed previously. Besides being starved, the Prodigal Son is now immensely in need of his father's love and is longing for his home. His father's love, which he feels now only in its entire purity, attracts him as does a magnetic force. He desires to be with his father and family, if not even as a "son," at least as a "hired servant." The discovery of the values he has lost, force him to become roused and forsake the company of the pigs. The center of gravity of the parable lies in these words: "I will rise and go to my father." These words contain the whole meaning of the Sunday. The rest is a familiar story.

The Prodigal Son, restored in his former position and happiness, now is mindful of what he possesses, that is, his father's riches. We may say, he has become a steward managing the properties of the family.

Archbishop Shnork Kaloustian

"The Golden Chain of Lenten Sundays"

FORGIVENESS

While throughout the year we all try to forgive those who have hurt us and are also anxious to be forgiven for our own wrongs, Lent is a very special time to clear our hearts of harbored resentments and pain. How difficult it is to overcome the pride and insecurities that help nourish hatred or guilt, yet how easy it is, when all is said and done, to open our hearts to those who have disappointed us — as in the story of the prodigal son — and to run with open arms to those we have wronged (father and son of the Prodigal Son parable..).

The "forgiveness target" is an interesting activity for almost all grades.

Each student should have two "bull's eye" targets on large sheets of white construction paper or newsprint. (A center circle and four concentric one-inch bands around it is sufficient.) In the center of one target, the student's name or snapshot should be placed. The band immediately next to the center circle (in both targets) should be painted one color (tempera paints are fine.) The next three bands should be painted the same color with increasing amounts of white paint so that the entire target goes from a bright center color to a final band of pale color. When the paint is dry have the student make notes within each band as to what they would like to be forgiven for. The center circle should contain the most important things, the palest band should contain the less important ones. For example the center circle may contain: "lying to a friend to get out of tough situations"...the final band, perhaps: "being late to my best friend's graduation"...

The same target should be prepared with someone else in mind, perhaps a friend, a brother or sister, etc., listing — again in order of importance — what they should be forgiven for. Stress to students that they should be as honest as possible.

When the project is concluded, discuss the results. Which target was easier to make? Was it easier to think of what we hold against others or what we consider to be our own wrongs? What can we do to obtain forgiveness? Discuss the parable of the Prodigal Son in this regard, taking a close look at the three main characters: the father — who forgave joyously; the lost son — who came to his father for humble forgiveness; the brother — who was angry that his brother's wrongs should be so easily forgiven. Where are we in the story???