



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
September 15, 2019

Are We “Older Sons”?

By Mary Katharine Deeley

A preacher at a prayer service read the story of the Prodigal Son. The story was so familiar, I tuned out until he reached the part about the reaction of the elder son complaining about his brother’s treatment. The preacher continued, “So the father responded, ‘You are absolutely right: Let’s send him away again.’” The congregation looked startled as this unfamiliar version rang in our ears. The preacher said, “That’s the way I always thought the story should have gone.” He continued to reflect on the passage and our all-too-

human reaction to a father who seems to spoil his younger kid rotten. The more he talked, the more I realized that there is a little of the elder son in all of us. We want to be rewarded, and we want those who are wrong to be punished.

I think today’s account in Exodus was written from that perspective. God, as we understand him, wants to strike down all those who made the golden calf—and rightfully so. But Moses reminds God of his promise to Abraham, a memory of love so powerful that God cannot destroy his children regardless of his anger. We don’t see how the Prodigal’s father responded when his younger son first left. Maybe he was angry or disappointed as we might have been. Rather, we see that his love was so powerful that the son is welcomed back and falls to his knees in relief and contrition.

“It’s pure grace that the father didn’t react as we might have,” said the preacher, “Thank God.” And he read the rest of the passage as it had been written. +

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A Word from Pope Francis

Emails, text messages, social networks, and chats can be fully human forms of communication....Social networks can facilitate relationships and promote the good of society, but they can also lead to further polarization and division between individuals and groups. The digital world is a public square...where we can either encourage or demean one another.

—Fiftieth World Communications Day, January 24, 2016



Sunday Readings

Exodus 32:7–11, 13–14

So the LORD changed his mind about the punishment he had threatened to inflict on his people.

1 Timothy 1:12–17

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am the foremost.

Luke 15:1–32 or 15:1–10

[Jesus said,] “We must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Am I too eager to advocate punishment instead of forgiveness?
- Before meting out punishment, do I pause to recall my own sins and failings?

Why Wait for Marriage (or Marry at All)?

Couples who live together before marriage generally divorce at higher rates than couples who don't.

By Jim Healy, PhD

My parents were married in 1960. They said, “We didn’t know anybody living together, and our friends didn’t either.” Few could claim that today. There are now millions of cohabiting opposite-sex couples in America, and most who marry this year (including Catholics) will have lived together first.

As a Church, how do we make sense of this? More personally, how do we respond if our children or acquaintances choose to cohabit? When we listen to cohabiting couples, they offer multiple reasons for living together. These range from wanting to be together more, sexual accessibility, economic necessity, wanting to “take the next step” in commitment, testing for compatibility, and reducing the possibility of divorce. So it’s important not to assume that we know why a couple is living together until we ask.

Implicit in the reasons given by many couples are questions about commitment. In a country where the divorce rate for first marriages hovers between 40 and 50 percent, cohabitation seems like a perfect way to test if a relationship is “marriage-



worthy.” The social sciences, though, clearly tell us that cohabitation actually has the opposite effect.

After years of research, it still appears that couples who live together before marriage generally divorce at higher rates than couples who don’t. Why? Because cohabiting couples blend their lives

in such a way that it’s difficult to leave, even if it’s clear that one should. When, as often happens, an ultimatum is offered (“Either we marry or somebody needs to move out”), the path of least resistance is to marry. Moving in with somebody you’re not sure you want to marry makes it more likely, not less, that you’ll marry the person against your better judgment.

If that research isn’t convincing, the theological arguments may be more compelling. We Catholics believe that marriage is a sacrament—a primary way of showing God’s faithful, creative love to the world. We believe that, when we make love, we are offering each other not just an action or a moment, but our entire lives, in imitation of the way Jesus offered his life for us. The Catholic Church says cohabitation is wrong, not because it increases human happiness, but because it limits it.

So how do we treat cohabiting couples who come to the Church requesting marriage? In St. John Paul II’s words

about cohabiting couples, we are to “make tactful and respectful contact with the couples concerned, and enlighten them patiently, correct them charitably and show them the witness of Christian family life, in such a way as to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 81).

In other words, we welcome them. We help them assess their readiness for marriage. We offer them the richness of our teaching on sexuality and marriage, and we challenge them with it—as we do with anyone preparing for marriage. We allow them to marry in the Church, inviting them into ongoing evangelization within our parishes.

What about parents, who are torn on how to react when their adult children choose cohabitation? Many parents who have navigated this challenge offer this advice: Be clear about your own beliefs and why you hold them, “living the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

And stay emotionally connected with your children. Tell them what you believe without repeating it whenever you see them. Your willingness to consider their viewpoints will win you the right to share your own perspectives. +

PRAYER

Lord, I am grateful for your gentle, guiding ways. Save me from losing myself in the things of the world.

Help me to find my way to your heart of goodness.

—From *Grateful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 16–21

Monday, Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian:
1 Tm 2:1–8 / Lk 7:1–10


Tuesday, Weekday:
1 Tm 3:1–13 / Lk 7:11–17

Wednesday, Weekday:
1 Tm 3:14–16 / Lk 7:31–35

Thursday, Weekday: 1 Tm 4:12–16 / Lk 7:36–50

Friday, Sts. Andrew Kim Tae-gŏn,
Paul Chŏng Ha-sang, and Companions:
1 Tm 6:2c–12 / Lk 8:1–3

Saturday, St. Matthew:
Eph 4:1–7, 11–13 / Mt 9:9–13

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