

Out of all the parables that Our Lord tells, the parable of today's Gospel, commonly known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, is best known by Christians and non Christians alike and I going to venture and say most loved. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI when commenting on this parable in one of his addresses states that the parable of the Prodigal Son, "never fails to move us and every time we hear or read it, it can suggest to us ever new meanings."

This year, in reading the parable, being moved in my heart and soul, the new meaning being suggested to me is that of the relationship of the two sons with the Father. It is only in right relationship with the Father that we know who we are, that we know our identity as children of God.

Unfortunately, many of us forget the relationship that we have with God, as our Father because we don't relate to God as a loving Father. Rather, we relate to Him as this authority figure, this other being who imposes rules on my life...who takes away my freedom to do what I want. And many of us are not even aware of this mentality...its just the way we were raised as children. This is the lesson that we learn from the older son in the parable today. On the return of his younger son, the merriment and celebration being heard, he goes to his father and says that he has been working like a slave...never breaking a command. He forgets that he is a son to the Father, and regards himself as a slave before the task master, authoritarian being who makes him work...with no freedom to even enjoy a young goat to celebrate. His Father has to remind him that he is a son and not a slave, "everything that I have is yours", and only in this relationship with him as father to son will he find true joy and happiness and that he can find that at the feast being thrown for his younger brother.

However, I think we relate more to the prodigal son because every time we sin, we forget that we are children of God. This is the lesson that we learn from the younger son in the parable today. Being restless, he runs away from his relationship to the Father trying to find joy and happiness outside of this relationship. He squanders everything and is brought very low in the social strata, starving and feeding the pigs. Coming to his senses, when he "came to himself"...when he remembered what he had when he was in right relationship with his Father, he returns...and through the loving embrace of the Father, his dignity is restored as a son by being robed in fine linen, receiving the ring, the seal if the household and true joy and happiness in a feast being thrown for his return.

It is only in right relationship with God the Father that we come to know our identity as children of God. But, through this relationship with God our Father as His children, we come to know more about Him...He reveals himself to us as a loving Father and experience Him as a merciful God. And this revelation is made through his beloved Son. As Pope Francis reflected during the Year of Mercy, Jesus Christ is the face of God's love and mercy. And it is through Christ, his passion death and resurrection in Baptism that we enter into the relationship with God as a loving Father as his children. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI comments, "Only by experiencing forgiveness, by recognizing one is loved with a freely given love a love greater than our wretchedness but also than our own merit do we at last enter into a truly filial and free relationship with God."

From our experience of love and mercy through the relationship with God as His children received at Baptism and in the other Sacraments, especially Confession and Eucharist, we are able to live the mission as an ambassador for Christ, continuing the mission of the beloved Son of reconciling the world to the Father. We are now to be the face of the Father's love and mercy to those we encounter. We show this love and mercy to our neighbours in need through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy...through sacrificial giving of our time, our talent and our treasure.

In many ways, during our Lenten spiritual journey, we are given a chance to return to the loving embrace...the relationship with our loving Father as His children and that we are loved with an everlasting love. As his children, we are now being invited to the feast being thrown for us, the Eucharist...This is where we will find true joy and happiness.