



Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 31, 2019

God's Extravagant Love for All of His People

By Mary Katharine Deeley

One of the deep meanings of this Gospel reading is signaled in verse 2: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Last Sunday, Jesus challenged the people to realize they were no better than those they condemned. The Pharisees and scribes had trouble with that lesson. They felt morally superior and more entitled to God's favor than those whose lives they questioned. Jesus turned that attitude on its head, showing time and again that God seeks out the sinner and the lost, particularly those who recognize that they are sinners

and lost. As long as the Pharisees and scribes did not see themselves that way, Jesus could not help them.

Dictionary.com Unabridged says *prodigal* means "wastefully or recklessly extravagant," so someone who is prodigal is lavish, a spendthrift. According to the Pharisees, Jesus was prodigal, for they considered his welcome of sinners as wildly wasteful, frittering away time and resources on people they thought were unworthy. But Jesus simply was showing them, and all of us, what God's love is like. God is extravagant in his love for saints and sinners alike. To some it might seem pointless or unjust to love and care for sinners and enemies, but God finds no one unworthy or unlovable—even those who reject him and oppress others.

Lent is a time to accept our sinfulness, our lost condition, and return home to the Father. Like the father of the prodigal son, God waits for that warm embrace, willing to give us everything. Hurry! +

Sunday Readings

Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

...The LORD said to Joshua: Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us.

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

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

***God finds no one
unworthy or unlovable—
even those who reject him
and oppress others.***

A Word from Pope Francis

Jesus takes from us our diseased humanity and we take from him his sound and healing humanity. This happens each time we receive a sacrament with faith: the Lord Jesus "touches" us and grants us his grace....We think especially of the sacrament of reconciliation, which heals us from the leprosy of sin.

—Angelus,
February 15, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I give thanks that God finds no one unworthy or unlovable—even me?
- Am I making the most of this Lenten season to return to God's warm embrace?

Lost and Found



By Richard Rohr, OFM

Of all Jesus' parables, the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is perhaps the most profound. The story is more that of the prodigal father, who is extravagant when it comes to his sons. The sons are prodigal in failure; the father in generosity.

The story is familiar: The younger son asks for a share of his father's estate. He wants a life apart. In effect, he says: "Give me my part of your stuff, Dad. I'm going to take off and live alone." His father obliges and the young man departs for a distant country, quickly squandering his inheritance. He is soon destitute—and chastened by his intemperance.

He returns home, prepared to acknowledge to his father that he has failed and no longer deserves to be called

his son. The younger son has come to his senses. He is content, even eager, to be treated as no more than a hired worker. But he's in for a big surprise, as we'll all be. God is greater than our sins.

Luke writes that while the younger son "was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him." He calls for a feast to celebrate his son's return. The older son protests that he has never disobeyed his father or given him grief. This is true, but the older son is trying to find his legitimacy in obedience, not love. He doesn't know about simple relationship—and the Bible is all about relationship. When we don't have a living relationship, we often try to substitute with duty and obligation.

A Glimpse of God

"Everything I have is yours," the father insists. What a marvelous response and image of God! God is like a prodigal father who welcomes his son without explanation. No questions are asked about why the son is returning home; no apology is requested. He throws his arms around him and invites everyone to celebrate because his son who "was dead has come to life again; he was lost and has been found."

This isn't just a son, but a returned son. It's when we return that we know how important union is, what strength and joy relationship gives. It's one of the most consistent messages of the Bible: It's in losing that we discover what we have. Alienation isn't the end of the world; it's the way we commonly come to God.

Most biblical figures are transformed

sinner, not people who walk a straight line to God. That isn't the path.

Universal Lesson

This parable of the prodigal son/father has power to change us because it names human relationships so perfectly. We see ourselves in both sons: We try to live autonomously, yet that eventually leads to alienation and unhappiness. Slowly we gather our truth and our identity. But we're also capable of being the older son who prides himself on his orthodoxy but is unable to celebrate and enjoy a free gift. So we end with an amazing story of one son who does it all right and is wrong, and another son who does it all wrong and is right!

In the end, we never learn whether the elder son attends the banquet, but we do know that the Father continues hoping that his son will come and not live in resentment or superiority toward his brother who has done it all wrong. It is an invitation to all who have perhaps been good Catholics, "older sons," but may also lack compassion and forgiveness. +

PRAYER

*Lord, you are the face of
God's compassion in the world.
Give me a compassionate heart
to embrace my suffering
brothers and sisters.*

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 1-6

Monday, Lenten Weekday:

Is 65:17-21 / Jn 4:43-54

Tuesday, Lenten Weekday:

Ez 47:1-9, 12 / Jn 5:1-16

Wednesday, Lenten Weekday:

Is 49:8-15 / Jn 5:17-30

Thursday, Lenten Weekday:

Ex 32:7-14 / Jn 5:31-47

Friday, Lenten Weekday:

Wis 2:1a, 12-22 / Jn 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Saturday, Lenten Weekday:

Jer 11:18-20 / Jn 7:40-53

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