

Homily on the Prodigal Son

24 February, 2008

Luke 15:11-32 and 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Our Lenten Countdown Continues this week with the Parable of the Prodigal Son

Last week, the virtuous life and pride of the Pharisee was juxtaposed with the sinful life and repentance of the Publican. This week, this juxtaposition continues, with the added theme of forgiveness.

Today: explore these two themes of **repentance** and **forgiveness**.

- **Repentance:** Recall the story of the Prodigal Son (unsatisfied, took inheritance, pursued a worldly life in a far country, eventually ran through his inheritance. A worldly life of sin. Painful.
 - The far country is full of famine. Full of hunger. Moreover, the food that the Prodigal desires is not real food: husks (even if given) provide no nourishment.
 - There is no compassion or love in the far country.
 - The people of that country were his friends and lovers as long as his inheritance remained. But is that true friendship? Is it love that only remains as long as there is something material to be gained? Is it love if you have to pay for it?
 - Once his inheritance was gone, the Prodigal could not even find honest work.
 - The Younger Son had submitted himself to the laws and culture of the far country. He gave it the best he had, and it all but destroyed him. His soul ached and yearned. His body ached and yearned.
 - Are we any different? Christ would have us know that we are like the Prodigal: *“Of what great blessings in my wretchedness have I deprived myself! From what a kingdom in my misery have I fallen! I have wasted the riches that were given me, I have transgressed the commandment. Alas, unhappy soul! Thou art henceforth condemned to the eternal fire. Therefore before the end cry out to Christ our God: Receive me as the Prodigal Son, O God, and have mercy upon me. (Vespers of the Prodigal Son)*
 - **The Younger Son “came to himself” in his wretchedness and repented.** If you have not come to yourself, perhaps your inheritance has not yet run out. But the hunger is there, waiting. Why wait to repent until you have lost everything? Repent now and return to your true home, where the love and food are real!
- **Forgiveness:** Recall how the Younger Son resolved to repent and offer himself as a servant, and how his Father accepted him, running with open arms!
 - Do you want to know the mind of God? Listen to Christ: God is our loving Father. He accepts our repentance. Celebrates our return (story of Prophet Hosea and his wife, Gomer...). True love desires what is best for us. Loves when we have nothing to offer (what do we have to offer but our sin and repentance? What do we have that God does not? He desires only our health!)
 - God is love and forgiveness. He is a good Father to us. We are to imitate him in his love and forgiveness. We are to grow in our desire for the health of all the world.
 - This is what it means to “love our neighbor” (love enemies? Start with your neighbor, your family). Which leads us back to the story: the bitterness of the Older Son.
- Older Son never left. If the Younger Son was like the Prodigal, the Older Son was just like the Pharisee. Followed the rules, but lacked love. If we are like the Younger Son, we are also like his brother.
 - **There is a sickness in this world that has altered our very minds:** we cannot rejoice at another’s joy (for if we are like the Younger Son in his sin, we are like the Older Son in our selfishness).
 - Why are we so insecure? How can we spend so much time around the love in this house and not learn to love? There is no excuse, no practical reason for this hardheartedness: the inheritance of God is eternal and unending. Trust me: we will never run out of food or room! The Father has more than enough love for all of us.
 - Perhaps we doubt our father’s wisdom? Perhaps we think we have better judgment, more discernment? If the wisdom of God seems like foolishness, then who is wise?
 - Although there is much to emulate in his life and steadfastness, the pride of the Older Brother is sinful. He had not yet learned how to love. He had not yet learned how to forgive. And he had learned one thing he should not have: how to judge (a lesson he must now unlearn to become healthy and grow).

We are all at different places in this parable: some more like the Prodigal, others more like the Older Brother. But there is one person who has no fault, and that is the Father. Let us all repent and grow in His likeness.