

Sunday of the Prodigal Son Luke:15:11-32

In the gospel reading for this Sunday, we are given the parable of the Prodigal Son. This is a great consolation for us. Not all of us have sinned to the extreme degree of this young man; our sins are layered in subtlety – in shades of darkness which cover the heart of the soul. But, for each one of us, the Prodigal story is our story.

This is an amazing story. In the time of our Lord's ministry, families held tight together, the land and inheritance passed down from previous generations. This, the request of the young man to divide the inheritance, was insulting to his father and was harmful to the whole family. Yet the father's love is not dimmed. He gives to him all he asks for and an extra dose of love.

This young man then lived a reckless and foolish life, wasting his possessions and finding himself in great need. He ends up taking care of swine in a far-off country. We see this son of a rich man, reduced to eating pig's food to satisfy his hunger. In his sorrow, he remembers the good times in his father's house and desires to return home. It is written, "he came to himself, and returned to his father," willing to be a hired servant, no longer with the rights of a son. We find the father, watching for him, with great love. I believe it is this love of the father that is the beacon of hope that draws this young man homeward and also calls us, that we might be restored in God's holy realm.

Like this young man, we don't deserve a new robe, the ring on the finger, new shoes. We don't deserve to be honored at a feast, yet God's love does not fail us. Before God, we are all alive and the boundaries of God's love are not limited by the steepness of our fall or the fragmentation of our hearts. Even though all of mankind has fallen, we are still of divine origin and we are called to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:38).

This example of the love of our Lord should be an example of our love towards our neighbor. Such is the love that God expects from us; that people might see we are His disciples and our hearts in some way resemble his heart. our hope should be a reflection of his glory.

We also see in this parable another fruitful lesson for all of us: the young man, who greatly erred freely admits that the responsibility for the darkening of his heart and abandoning himself to the passions is his fault. He doesn't try to shift the blame. He

doesn't try to bury his guilty feelings and doesn't just commiserate with those who have made similar mistakes.

When there is this kind of honesty, there can be reconciliation, harmony, peace, and restoration. The Prodigal Son doesn't stop with the realization of his great folly, like Judas did, but he takes the next step and says, "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.'"

Without being willing to admit that we have sinned, we are forced to create all kinds of reasons for our condition. We begin to use excuses, self-pity and personal attack on other people as a way of explaining to ourselves why our life is not working very well. Even in marriages, where there is meant to be a reflection of God's love for the Church, we see the great value of mutual forgiveness, which is based upon individual realization of our own sinfulness.

So the prodigal son renounces his earthly mistakes, returns to his father and is given new garments to wear, the best robe which symbolizes God's riches and beauty and the robe of holiness and purity with which Adam was robed before he sinned. We are reminded in the baptism service, "As many of you who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." This new robe symbolizes being reborn, forgiven and received by God. The new shoes which he receives represent firmly walking in the way of God. The ring signifies the soul's betrothal to Christ.

Let us use these coming days of repentance to admit our mistakes and take hold of life. Receiving the promise given by our Lord, Jesus Christ, we can begin again to live as true Christians who seek to return to the heavenly Father, whose loving gaze has never departed from us.