

Twentieth-Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time-C

Lk 15: 1-32

Dear Friends,

All three parables have one dominant and common theme. They are totally excessive in their contradiction of common sense. They all point to the extravagance of God's mercy. Particularly, the story of the father and the sons changes the theme from sin and forgiveness. This was the concern of the Pharisees and clearly the driving anxiety of the younger son. Jesus saw the issue differently. It was about a human being lost and a human being found.

We need to see ourselves in both sons. When we repent, like the first son, we have our story ready. The father has no interest in the story. His son was dead and now is alive. The father will have nothing to do with hired servant nonsense. This is his son. The ring and sandals and feast are all symbols of his unconditional welcoming of the son in his merciful embrace. Like the shepherd and the woman, the father knows what was lost and has been found. It is time to celebrate.

As we move on to the second son, we can recognize ourselves as the victim in many of our life situations. His complaints have a good deal of merit.

However, they miss the point that the father sees so clearly. It is not about things but people. Possessions and privileges just do not make sense when measured

against life, love and mercy. **“My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found” (Lk 15: 32).**

This story opens itself into an immeasurable panorama of interpretations. They all expose our human condition in the depth and breadth of its brokenness. It is this very brokenness that displays the mercy of God. We are fond of saying that this mercy knows no limits. The actions of the father help us journey from the head to the heart when pondering this great mystery of a God calling us to the banquet of life despite our sinfulness.

All the great spiritual teachers of the Christian tradition emphasize the only way to know God is to know ourselves first. The story of the two sons shows us this profound truth. Only when they accept their own weakness are they able to begin to appreciate the love and mercy of the father.

We never find out if the older brother was able to break through his blindness of the commercial relationship by which he defined the father. What we do know is that the father was relentless in his pursuit of both sons. Their choice was to accept or reject this love and mercy. On the father's part, there was only the continuing offer of love and the invitation to the banquet.

The message comes across in so many different levels. God is always accepting us. God is always forgiving us. God is always pursuing us. In the end, the call could not be clearer. We need to let God's mercy and love define our lives in every way possible.