

**SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON,
JANUARY 22/FEB 4, 2007**

I CORINTHINANS 6: 12-20

ST. LUKE 15: 11-32

by

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Gospel: *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 I 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 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.

In a secular way, we can see the brother's point about the wayward brother being greeted in such a warm and kindly forgiving way by his father. Particularly when the "good" older brother had scrupulously followed the proper path of behaviour and trustworthiness. But Christ came for sinners who repent and follow Him. The younger brother had sinned but recognised it as such. He had come back in repentance and by it he was, again, his father's son.

The Parable And Its Representations

We should remember that this is Christ's parable, His method of teaching His Way. The man in the parable represents God, Who loves man. The two brothers represent the righteous and the sinners. Righteousness was in human nature from the beginning, but evil is a later thing that afflicts man. The elder son exercised his custodianship of the property gift from God in a righteous manner, for the glory of God. It is the younger son who is afflicted with the later evil:

But sin is an evil thing which was born later. This is why it is the younger son who alienates himself from the father, for the latter-born son grew up together with sin which had insinuated itself into man at a later time. The sinner is also called the younger son because the sinner is an innovator, a revolutionary, and a rebel, who defies his Father's will.¹

The younger son, the sinner, is rebellious, becomes alienated from God and wants his share now!

God Allows Us To Choose Our Path:

All men possess reason and, together with it, free will; they freely walk whither they will. God does not compel anyone, whether he live wisely or wickedly. Good and evil lie within the free choice of each man. Possessing reason and free will, it behooves everyone to lead a life that is good and pleasing to God. For we praise good men who are good by *choice, not by any necessity* (emphasis supplied). It is not proper for Christians in general to correct sinners by force when they stumble, and they are not given leave to do so. The Lord does not bestow crowns on those who are compelled to refrain from evil, but rather on those who do good by their own free choice.²

God gives us the gift of free will within which to exercise the logos of reason, also given to us by the Lord "to use, according to our free will, as our own essential property".³ Some of us choose to exercise the Lord's generous gift for the glory of God whilst some of us "squander the divine gift".⁴ God gives all of us an equal share of logos, logos as understood by the Church "is not only Christ Himself, the Word of God, but also the faculties of speech, thought, mind and reason which God gave of Himself to those created beings, angels and men, whom he fashioned in His own image and likeness".⁵

What we do with "our property" (actually God's) is up to us. God does not force us into His service. We must accept His Cross voluntarily. There is no compulsion here. As Bl. Theophylact, following the Fathers of the Church, states the matter: "If He had wanted to compel us, he would not have created us with logos and a free will."⁶ Of course, even with our free will, we can do nothing without the grace of God.

God Is Merciful To Sinners

The Lord loves all of us and wishes all to follow Him and be saved. He is particularly merciful to sinners. He actively seeks sinners' salvation:

God is good towards all; He is long-suffering and loves mankind. Especially does He show His goodness to sinners. While He is always seen to be stern with the righteous, to sinners He is merciful, a swift Helper Who stirs them with kind promises. As I live, saith the Lord, I desire not the death of a sinner, but that he turn from his way and live (Ezek. 18:23; 35:11).⁷

What Then Is The meaning Of This Parable?

It's all about repentance and how God loves for us to choose a new life, repent and go forward with Him:

Furthermore, the Lord is always seeking the salvation of all who sin. He has given them repentance as a treatment and healing of sins, and he never stops teaching about repentance and conversion. In sermons, parables and figures He stirs us up to repentance; for this reason he offers us the present parable...⁸

Some Other Symbolisms The Lord Utilises in This Parable

As previously mentioned, the man (father) is God Who has two kinds of sons, the righteous and the sinner. In addition, the younger son had gone into a "far country," the latter meaning he had gone away from God and become rebellious. He "squandered and scattered his property" meaning his logos is scattered and the unity of virtue is destroyed, i.e., when one no longer walks with God. When he acts against God's will, then a "mighty famine" occurs, not of food "but a famine of hearing the word (logos) of the Lord (Amos 8:11)". The younger son is "in want" because he has left the Lord's path. All he need do is return to the Lord and he will not be in want.⁹

By joining himself *to a citizen of that country* means joining with the demons (or chief of demons):

The citizens of that country far from God are none other than the demons. The man who joins himself to these citizens, having advanced and become powerful in wickedness, *feeds the swine*, that is, he teaches others evil and filthy deeds. For all those who take pleasure in the muck of shameful deeds and carnal passions are like swine.¹⁰

When the younger son *came to himself*, he again returned to his good true self from "outside himself". He realised his problems and repented of them. The *hired* servants mean the "catechumens, who have not yet become sons because they have not been illumined by Holy Baptism". They have an abundance of bread, the rational bread, coming from their daily reading

of the Scriptures. “Hired servants” also refers to “those in the Church who obey God out of some lesser motive than love”.¹¹

The younger son realised he had abandoned “heavenly things,” been sinful and chosen “shameful pleasure” and the “land of hunger” rather than heaven. Once he confessed his sin, he realised he had sinned against God. The father went to the son and extended his compassion even before the son came to him:

But when the son drew near through prayer and repentance, it was fitting that God again enclose him within His embrace. Therefore the Father *falls on the neck* of the one who before had rebelled and who now shows that he has become obedient. And the Father kisses him, as a sign of reconciliation, and by this kiss he first makes holy the defiled one’s mouth, which is as it were the doorway to the whole man, and through this doorway he sends sanctification into the innermost being.¹²

The father saying to his servants, considered to be angels, to bring the younger son the first robe means to clothe him with his initial garment we wore before sinning; or, the garment honoured over all others, the robe of Baptism. The baptismal robe covers our former shame. The *servants* may also be considered to be priests, who clothe the repentant sinner with the baptismal robe since with this “we that have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ”. The *ring on his hand* can be considered the seal of Christ given at Chrismation, the *hand* an action symbol and the *ring* a symbol of the seal. The seal and mark of Christ “show that he has been made new in the image of his Creator”. His *shoes* protect him against scorpions understood to be “seemingly small and hidden sins described by David, which are in fact deadly” and from serpents, open sins which can be observed by everyone. *Shoes* can also be understood alternatively as “given to him who has been counted worthy of the *first robe*.”¹³

The fatted calf referred to as *the grain-fed bullock* by Bl. Theophylact that is fattened, killed and then eaten

is none other than the very Son of God, Who as a Man took flesh which is irrational and animal in nature, although he filled it with His own glory. Thus Christ is symbolised by the bullock, the Youngling which has never been put under the yoke of the law of sin; and He is *grain-fed* in the sense that Christ was set apart and prepared for this mystery from *before the foundation of the world* (emphasis supplied).¹⁴

In the Eucharist, the Bread broken is Flesh though it appears to be bread and “may be called the *Bullock*. For Christ Himself is both *Bullock* and *Wheat*”. Those restored to being a son, those cleansed of sin commune of this “*Bullock of Wheat*”.¹⁵ The younger son had been lost but has returned in repentance. He is now a cause for joy.

Who Are Those Being Saved?

There are three kinds, slaves, hirelings and sons:

Among those who are being saved there are three categories: slaves, hirelings and sons. The slave does good for *fear of being beaten*; The hireling does those things which are good and pleasing to God *in order to receive a reward*.... But the son keeps the commandments of his God and Father *out of love for Him*. (all emphases supplied)¹⁶

The younger son realises his sins and arises to go to his Father and contritely confesses he has sinned. The compassionate Father (God) is more than willing to take him back:

For as soon as the Lord sees the fervency of a sinner's conversion and his wholehearted repentance and contrition, He accepts him, pours forth His clemency, runs to him, falls on his neck and kisses him. It was for this that He came into the world, to save sinners such as this prodigal.¹⁷

The 'Celebrated Question' And Its Connection To The Reason The Parable Is Told

The elder righteous son displayed great envy upon hearing that his wayward brother had returned to such a reception. Why did he do this when, in other respects, he had faithfully served his father? It goes to the heart regarding why the Lord told this parable and others before it; He directed it in reference to the Pharisees who thought themselves to be righteous and pure and were upset with the Lord's merciful treatment of harlots and publicans. The grumbling son, here, in this parable can be seen as "all those who are scandalised at the sudden good fortune and deliverance of sinners". They are scandalised because they can't [nor can we] fathom why God has such compassion of man. This parable is really not about envy but stands as spiritual instruction to the righteous Pharisees. Sinners are also sons. Why, then, show displeasure over the joy of a sinner's salvation?

Do you see that this parable is not about envy? Instead, by means of this parable, the Lord is instructing the minds of the Pharisees, so that they will not be vexed that the Lord receives sinners, even though they themselves are righteous, and have fulfilled every commandment of God.¹⁸

...

The parable also instructs us that no matter how righteous we may be, we ought not to rebuff sinners, nor to grumble when God accepts them. The younger son, therefore, represents the harlots and the publicans; the elder son represents those Pharisees and scribes who consider themselves righteous. It is as if God were saying, 'Let us suppose that you are indeed righteous and have not transgressed any commandments; if some others have turned away from wickedness, why do you *not* (emphasis supplied) accept them as your brothers and fellow laborers?'¹⁹

We need to curtail the Pharisee in all of us! Our concern should be with ourselves and what we are doing by our faith and resultant good works. We should not remind others of our ‘goodness’. Humility from the heart paves the way for our progress toward salvation. Without humility steeped in faith, our salvation is impossible. So let’s look inward upon our hearts and be glad when one who has become lost or dead returns to the Christian fold.

This parable teaches us not to grumble and otherwise object to God extending his mercy to forgive repentant sinners and thus assure them of their salvation. Don’t we want the same consideration shown by the Lord to us? We need to take the charitable view. The righteous must never turn their backs on sinners, for how do the so-called righteous know the sinner has not repented? So,

one must display repentance, compunction and glorification of God, for this is truly good, beneficial and salutary. Then our Father, Who is desirous of love, will receive us kindly and mercifully; he will fall upon us to embrace us; he will clothe us in our original garment of passionless-ness; He will confer upon us the pledge of the Holy Spirit, and will vouchsafe us the kingdom of heaven.²⁰

This is the Christian way.

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke, Vol. III* in the series, Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of the New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 194.

² Hieromonk German Ciuba, (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 16.

³ Bl. Theophylact, *op.cit.*, p. 194.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *id.*, see fn 2.

⁶ *id.*, p. 195.

⁷ Hieromonk German Ciuba, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹ Bl. Theophylact, *op.cit.*, pp. 195-196.

¹⁰ *id.*, p. 196.

¹¹ *id.*, pp. 197-198.

¹² *id.*, p. 199.

¹³ *id.*, pp. 199-200.

¹⁴ *id.*, 200-201 (and see Ciuba’s translation of the fatted calf discussion on p. 23).

¹⁵ *id.*, p. 201.

¹⁶ Hieromonk German Ciuba, *op.cit.*, p. 20 (and also see Bl. Theophylact for almost identical language at p. 198).

¹⁷ *id.*, p. 22, which is also basically replicated in Bl. Theophylact's work, see endnote 12 above.

¹⁸ Bl. Theophylact, *op.cit.*, p. 202.

¹⁹ *id.*, pp. 203-204.

²⁰ Ciuba, *op.cit.*, p. 27.