

27. March 2022

The Father's love for his two sons

Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

The tax collectors and sinners, however, were all crowding round to listen to him, and the Pharisees and scribes complained saying, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he told them this parable: Then he said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, let me have the share of the estate that will come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. 'When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch; so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled himself with the husks the pigs were eating but no one would let him have them. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's hired men have all the food they want and more, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired men." So he left the place and went back to his father. 'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we will celebrate by having a feast, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate. 'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. The servant told him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the calf we had been fattening because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out and began to urge him to come in; but he retorted to his father, "All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property - he and his loose women - you kill the calf we had been fattening." 'The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I

have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found.' '

It is always a joy to look at this text and to interpret it, even if one does not know how to exhaust its depth. This text fits wonderfully into the overall message of what God wants to say to us in the Holy Scriptures. God wants us to understand how much he loves us. This is his great concern, because we humans unfortunately find it quite difficult to really grasp this and to understand this love as a secure basis for our lives. Love means the great YES for us, which God never withdraws, even if man strays!

The prodigal son - an image for humanity - is in danger of squandering the inheritance, of getting away with it with "loose women", as the text expresses it. Whoring in the biblical image means getting involved with idols instead of staying with God and living with him (*cf. e.g. Hos 4:12-13*). The end of this is misery, even if it is not always of a material nature, but of a spiritual nature.

God in the image of the father, however, is ready to accept humanity, indeed it means a great feast when a sinner repents (*cf. Lk 15:7*). What would it mean if many people were to repent, if they understood that they were losing the most precious thing God had given them, namely the receptivity to His love, and were now finding it again!

Today I would like to direct our attention first to the son who stayed in his father's house and does not understand that when the prodigal son returns, a special feast is celebrated, while he never experienced such favour as his brother did.

Let us look at his situation. He bears the burden of the day, so to speak. His life may not be marked by special high points or low points. It may be a quiet run marked by much work, which he performs conscientiously with his father in mind. He did not understand his brother's departure! Such a step would be out of the question for him. He is probably too dutiful and also too reverent towards his father.

He does not understand his father's reaction to his brother's return. On the contrary, he feels hurt and not respected enough in his service: *"All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property - he and his loose women - you*

kill the calf we had been fattening.” Why should the one who proved unfaithful receive such special consideration?

Here we leave the humanly perhaps understandable reaction of the faithful son and turn to the Father!

There was great concern for the prodigal son. Surely he was looking out for him and it hurt his heart that he squandered his inheritance and suffered hardship. When we see God in the image of the father, then we know that he knows exactly what the son lost and how he is really doing.

What joy when the son finally comes to understand, when he has him with him again, when he opens himself to the love of the Father. This joy is almost exuberant, it has to find an expression and in the human-natural realm it often expresses itself in a feast with music and dance!

But the father does not forget his faithful son who feels left behind. He goes out to him urges him to come in. He tries to make him understand how to assess this situation correctly. The son was lost and came back! And then he tells him these wonderful words: *“My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours.”*

The faithful son should understand that he is not worth less to the Father than the one who came back. The love between the Father and him has not been disturbed. The son is always with him, their love has grown, naturally, it needs no particularly grand gestures.

Perhaps this is an indication for those souls who have always been, or have long been, walking their way with God. Their reward and their joy is to always be with the Father. He himself is their reward and this reward has never been squandered. They live in the Father's love and are invited to share in the Father's joy when the lost return to the Father's house!