

**Lectio Divina: The Parable of the Prodigal Son**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Read Luke 15: 11-32

The father in the parable is depicted as a wealthy farmer, with servants and land, so that his sons would have enjoyed privileged status in the community. But, the younger son isn't satisfied with how things are. He wants everything that that he is set to inherit upon his father's death, and he wants it now.

The father honors the request of his son, and with lots of money in his pocket, the younger son sets out on a journey to a far-away land – far away from his father, far away from his older brother, and far away from any sense of responsibility and moral restraint.

The father probably had to sell off some of his land to be able to give his young son his share of the estate. How do you think the father felt about his young son's request?

*The father was probably disappointed with his son's request, and felt rejected by him.*

What is God's response when we want to do things our way instead of His way?

*God has given us free will and respects our choices – even if it is a rejection of Him.*

What does the younger son do with his share of the money?

*He squanders it living a wild life.*

What does the younger son do after he runs out of money?

*He realizes what he's done and decides to return to his father and ask forgiveness.*

The son looks at his situation, and decides to go back home. He plans what he will say to his father before he gets there. How does this correspond to how we should approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

*Reconciliation begins before we enter the confessional. We need to spend time preparing to receive the Sacrament. We need to examine our sinful thoughts, words and actions with a contrite heart.*

Verse 15:20 says, "...While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him." For the son, things are very different from when he left his father's house. He has failed. He has lost everything. He has sinned. But, for his father, it is as if the son had never left. Before the son can even finish his full apology, the father cuts him off with plans to celebrate his son's return. What does this tell us about God's response to our desire to be reconciled to Him when we have sinned and gone astray?

*God is always patiently waiting, just like the father in the parable, to welcome us back into friendship with Him. He knows what is in our heart and the moment we tell Him that we want to restore union with Him, he runs to us to take us back.*

Can you relate to the father in this parable? Has a family member or friend hurt you and later apologized for their behavior? Were you able to forgive as effortlessly as the father, or was it easier to hold a grudge?

*Answers will vary*

What do you think would have happened if the father, instead of patiently waiting for his son to come to his senses and return home, had gone after him when he first left to convince him to come back?

*The son probably would not have returned, or would have done so begrudgingly. Just like the father in the parable, God doesn't force us to come to Him. He waits patiently for us to realize that we truly want to be with Him.*

While all of this has been going on, the older son had remained home, dutifully carrying out his duties on his father's estate. What is his response when he comes in from working in the field to find his younger brother has returned, and his father is celebrating with a feast for him?

*He is angry and begins ranting about how he has slaved away for his father with no thanks!*

Can you relate to what the older brother is feeling? If you have siblings, you probably can. Sometimes life can seem terribly unfair. Maybe you've always worked hard to get good grades, while your sister or brother brings home C's and D's. Then, finally they get their act together and make an A on one test and your parents react as if he or she has just cured cancer!

It can be frustrating to think that our steady efforts have gone unnoticed. What does the father tell his older son that might be helpful to those of us who have felt the same way?

*The father explains that "you are always with me." The father's love for his obedient son has not changed - it's still there. And, the older son is still going to inherit everything that the father has. Sometimes when we try so hard to be good and to do good, we forget that's not the full extent of our relationship with God. We should allow ourselves to celebrate this wonderful relationship and to enjoy the presence of God in our lives.*

The story ends with the father inviting the older son to come and join the celebration, but we don't know if he does. What do you think happens? Does the older brother soften his heart and join in? What would you do?

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