

## **Luke 15: 11-32**

- To begin this hour we will prayerfully listen to and reflect on Luke 15: 11-32, a parable of mercy.
- Let's remind ourselves that we are in the presence of our Eucharistic Lord and prepare ourselves to hear his word.
- Come Holy Spirit, help us open our hearts and minds to the scriptures that you have inspired. Your word is alive and active and can speak to us today. Help us to leave behind our own expectations and pay attention to what you are doing in us through these words.

(Slowly read the scripture passage.)

## Luke 15: 11-32

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." '

This parable is often referred to as “the story of the prodigal son” and it is one that we have heard many times before. We often reflect upon the wayward son who squanders his inheritance, is overcome with repentance and returns home ready to accept the lowest job his father will offer him but finds that he is welcomed with open arms. This emphasis is definitely important because we are the wayward son; we are the sinners, the ones who ask too much of our heavenly Father, waste the blessings He showers upon us and then come crawling back feeling guilty and shameful.

However, it is worth reflecting on the mercy of the father in this story because it is overwhelming and unrelenting. Do we believe in and experience this kind of mercy? Let us take the time to reflect deeply upon the character of this compassionate father because it helps us to comprehend something of the mercy of our heavenly father. This perspective enables us to understand our identity as sons and daughters of God. Unfortunately, it is all too easy for us to grasp the concept of our sinfulness and unworthiness but it is difficult for us to realise and accept the fullness of love that God is offering us.

The first thing we notice about the father in this story is that he is not concerned with providing for his children according to what they deserve; his love is unconditional. He hands over the younger son’s inheritance without a second thought. Then, rather than being upset with his son for his ingratitude and desire to search for better things, he waits longingly for his son to return. Finally, overcome with compassion, he runs out to meet his son and does not wait for an apology or explanation of what happened to the inheritance; he lavishes love upon him without hesitation. The way that the father loves his sons seems almost excessive.

The father’s mercy does not stop at the younger son. He also reaches out to the older son with love and compassion. The older son is not able to see his brother through the father’s eyes of mercy. He becomes angry and resentful when he sees how his father is treating the younger son. He disowns him, referring to him to his father as “this son of yours”. Instead of reprimanding the older son, the father goes outside to his son and meets him where he has placed himself. The father pours out his mercy once more; he reminds his older son of his identity and place in his heart but also tenderly encourages the older son to look, with him, through the lens of love.

In this story, the father’s mercy is transformative and empowering. The love that the father lavishes on his sons floods the younger son and eliminates his fear. As it says in Scripture, “Perfect love casts out all fear”. With revitalising love, the son’s dignity is restored. It is not his repentance alone that heals him but his father’s overwhelming compassion; a compassion that is life-giving and restorative. We do not know what effect the father’s love has on the older son but we are able to see through his tenderness that the father longs to see the softening of his son’s heart.

This is how our God sees us. He does not question us or ask us to prove ourselves. He provides for us and loves us unconditionally. He sees our sin but waits longingly for us to come back to him so that he can transform us.

Here, before the Blessed Sacrament and united with Christ, let us soak in the loving mercy of our Father whose love for us is uncontainable and unfathomable.

*Loving Father, you call us to be merciful like you. Yet, it is only by receiving your mercy that we can even begin to pour it out to others. Let us allow your mercy to soften our hearts. Flood our fears and anxieties with your mercy, allow us to be transformed and help us to realise our identity as your sons and daughters.*