

The prodigal son and the prodigal father

When we hear the word "prodigal," we often think of someone who is wayward or rebellious. But did you know that it also means extravagant or lavish? This paradox is at the heart of Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son, a story that teaches us about God's extravagant love and mercy. In the parable, the second son demands his inheritance while his father is still alive, a request that is both shocking and culturally wrong. By doing so, the son is essentially wishing his father dead. This is a powerful metaphor for sin, which is a form of wilful rebellion against God. As the second son journeys away from home, he experiences a downward spiral of immorality, poverty, and disgrace. But when he reaches the lowest point of his life, he comes to his senses and returns to his father. As St. Ambrose notes, "He rightly returns to himself, because he departed from himself. For he who returns to God restores himself to himself and he who departs from Christ rejects himself from himself."

The father's response to his son's return is a powerful example of God's extravagant love. He was eagerly looking out for his return. On sighting him from a distance, despite his son's ritual uncleanness, the father runs towards him, embracing and kissing him in front of everyone. Further he clothed him not with any garment but with the best robe and with the family's signet ring symbolizing his full restoration as a son. More still he showed his prodigality towards him by declaring a banquet celebrating the reconciliation of the son with his father, his family, his community and his God.

In addition, the father noticing that the elder son out of jealousy and anger refused to join the party went out and met him admonishing him on the need to treasure who he is (son of the kingdom) and what he has (loving relationship with the father) encouraging him to enter the party. We were not told the elder brother's response.

The parable also highlights the importance of confession and forgiveness. The four conditions for a valid confession are contrition, confession, sincere promise to avoid occasions of sin, and absolution. As we reflect on our own lives, we may realize that we have been away from our church and the sacraments, especially reconciliation. But it's never too late to return to God, once we make a step towards Him, He will run towards us and lavish His unconditional love and forgiveness on us.

Dear friends, the parable of the Prodigal Son is unfinished, leaving us to complete the story in our own lives. Will we respond to God's extravagant love with gratitude and obedience, or will we remain stuck in our sin and rebellion? The choice is ours.

As we journey through Lent, let us imitate the prodigality of God by living compassionate lives. Compassion is the art of recognizing the other person's needs and getting involved to help. We can show compassion in practical ways, such as giving attentive listening ears to the hurting, meeting physical needs, practising forgiveness and praying for others.

Blessings.