

✠ LUKE 15:1-3a, 11-32 ✠

### In Nomine Iesu

Something is troubling about this parable of the Prodigal Son. The father, in the beginning, gives to his youngest son the inheritance. Why?

In the request, the son is boasting to his father that he considers his father to be dead, else why ask for the inheritance? The son has every intention, it seems, of going off with his newfound wealth and spending it as he sees fit, not as his father would have him spend it. So why does the father give him the inheritance?

Why doesn't the father instead turn on his son and rebuke him with righteous anger, saying, "No! You will not get your inheritance; I am not yet dead that you should be in charge of my wealth! Get away from me you wicked son! You do not consider me but only your selfish desires. You insult me and disown me, I will not give you what you ask!" It seems that this would perhaps be a better way of dealing with such a selfish and wicked son. Who, by the way, the father could have had stoned to death according to the Law of Moses. "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city ... and they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear" (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

So, why, then, does the father give his son the inheritance? It seems that instead of correcting and disciplining his son, he is encouraging his son's bad behavior. Well, the problem is solved, when we take into account who it is that is telling the story, Jesus, and when we consider a few of the nuances of the story. First of all, and most importantly, this is the father's son. That much is made clear by the beginning of the parable: "There was a man who had two sons." Secondly, By virtue of being a son of the father, both sons were righteous. That is, both sons were equally sons. Both had the possessions of the father, as the father later tells his eldest son, "You are my son and always with me, and all that is mine is yours."

By this we know why the father gave to the youngest son the inheritance asked for: it was already his. "By the fact that you are my son, all that I have is yours." Here are echoed Jesus' words, "Ask and it shall be given to you" (Luke 11:9). However, the father's words, "All that I have is yours," does not change the fact that the wealth still belonged to the father. The wealth was the father's, and so it was also the son's. The youngest son's sin was not in asking for the inheritance, for it was his already, but in not spending that inheritance in the father's house.

He departed from his father's house. He went into a foreign land, among a foreign people, and gave the wealth of his father to those who did not belong to his father's house. He cast his pearls before the swine (Matthew 7:6), and so lost what was rightfully his.

Such is the lot of mankind. We dwelt in the presence of our heavenly Father in the Garden of Eden, but we asked for that which we already possessed, the knowledge of what is good and what is evil, and with it we traveled away from the divine Word, seeking glory where there is no glory, and so gave away our inheritance of life in the presence of God.

And so we starve. We hunger for the food that was once ours by right. We yearn for the fellowship with our Father that we once had. Yet we are in a desolate place; a land that is in drought and famine, dying for the lack of righteousness. And here we so often sit, our clothes soiled with the filth of pigs, and our money squandered on the lusts of the flesh. And just as this younger son was so far removed from his father's house that he desired even the food of pigs, so, too, is man so far removed from the Father's house that he thinks the vain philosophies and false religions of those who do not belong to the Father will satisfy his hunger and cravings for righteousness.

But we who call ourselves Christians do not fare much better as things go in life. We often give up our rightful place by spending our righteousness on unrighteous things. Instead of glorifying God for our salvation, we think to ourselves, "I have forgiveness, therefore I will sin all the more." That which was meant for us as children of the Father, we have given to those who do not care about our Father or His house. What do those around us think of our Father when they see that what He has given us, His children, we do not take care of or treasure? When we reject His Word for the ideas of man; when we desecrate His Supper with the philosophies of the world; or when we forget that we too are sinners in need of God's grace, and so we treat others as more sinful and wicked than we are, and are thereby condemned. So often the world simply says to those who would call themselves Christian: "Why would we want to join you who despise the things you're supposed to hold the most dear?"

We think to ourselves, "I've got this being a Christian down. I know I'm a sinner, and I confess as much, and I know I have forgiveness." But then why do we not think of what this really means. For with forgiveness, with salvation, comes the gifts of God almighty: righteousness, holiness, glory, honor, love, chastity, grace, and so many more that we cannot possibly exhaust the benefits and treasures of being born of water and the Spirit. The things of God are our inheritance, yet we so often treat them with disrespect and contempt.

Yet just as this youngest son was not without hope, neither are we without hope. Despite his wayward life and wicked deeds, he still knew who his father was. This was not because of his righteousness or merit, but because his father had given him life. So with us our heavenly Father has given us life in the name of Jesus, who gives us His Spirit by whom we cry out, "Abba Father!" (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). For the Spirit of God is upon us at our birth in the holy waters of Baptism. We are born son's of God, heirs to His heavenly kingdom, and like the conscience of the youngest son, desiring to be back in his father's house, the Spirit of God cries out to us: "Repent! Go back to the house of God where you will be welcomed as a child of the king. Return to your land, the land flowing with milk and honey, and you will be satisfied in your hunger and your thirst will be quenched."

Here we see the great love of God. He does not wait for us to draw near to Him, but He comes running to us, lest fear grip us and we chicken out of repenting of our sins, He comes running to us and embraces us, kisses us, and holds us near to Him. Think of your child who is playing in the street and does not see the car that narrowly misses ending his fragile life. You run to him and hold him and kiss him, bursting with joy that your son, who was as good as

dead, is now safe in your arms. Such is the love of God toward us, who ran to us by being born of the Blessed Virgin; who ran to us by taking the beating meant for us; who ran to us by hanging cursed upon a tree so that we should live in His kingdom as sons and daughters of God.

Here is redemption. When the eldest son came to his father, he complained of what? He complained that the fattened calf was sacrificed for his wayward brother, yet he had never had even a goat to celebrate with, which is not true, since all that the father had was also his. And in the fullness of Jesus words, he relays the entire message of the Gospel as he tells of the father's response. "It was necessary to celebrate in this way because your brother, who was lost, has been found; he was dead and is now alive." It was necessary to have a feast. Imagine if the father had welcomed his son back with open arms and a joyful homecoming but did not invite him to the dinner table. How many of us, when our children visit, or we visit our parents, deny or are denied the homecoming feast? None of us. We go out and spend more than we should on food and desserts, drink and merriment, so that there is an abundance; too much to eat. If there had been no feast, there would have been no inclusion of the youngest back into the family.

So the calf's body is sacrificed and its blood is spilled; it is made ready to be eaten by the family of the father. The table is set, guests are invited, and the servants happily and busily prepare everything, for the father's happiness is their happiness. The father calls out to all in his house, "Come, it is prepared. Come eat and drink with me so that all may know that you are mine and are under my roof; that all may know that you are restored to your place as my son. Come, eat and drink, for it is by this fellowship, when we eat of the same food and drink from the same cup, that we are made to be one." So when all are gathered together at the Table, the Head of the Table takes the bread and gives thanks, breaks it and says, "Take, eat; this is My Body, given for you." In the same way also He takes the cup, and having given thanks, He gives it to you saying, "Drink of it, all of you, this cup is the new testament in My Blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this often in remembrance of Me."

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠