



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

## March 27, 2022 Fourth Sunday of Lent

If someone gave you a new BMW as a gift, would you say, “Thank you”? If you won a million dollars in the lottery, would you celebrate? If a deep division in your family was finally healed and your family was reconciled, would you be happy? I think all of us would say, “Yes, for sure.” Common wisdom indicates that when wonderful things happen to us, we are thankful, we celebrate. This is what makes the response of the prodigal son in today’s gospel so peculiar. This younger son has made a mess of his life. He squanders his inheritance and deeply wounds his family. But when he decides to return home out of desperation, his father welcomes him with open arms, puts the best robe on him, puts a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet, kills the fatted calf, and announces a celebration.

It would be hard to imagine a greater turn-around for the fortunes of this prodigal son. His homecoming was a hundred times more successful than anything he could have imagined. Yet this is what makes his response to the father so strange: it is not there. When the father welcomes the son home, the younger prodigal son says nothing—not, “Thank you,” not “How wonderful this is” not “I love you.” There is nothing, only silence. Now perhaps the writer of this parable simply forgot to put the response of the prodigal in. But it is also possible that the silence of this younger son is an invitation to us to examine our relationship with God more deeply.

Perhaps this parable is saying that, contrary to common wisdom, we are not always thankful when wonderful things happen to us. Sometimes we find a way of resisting the love and forgiveness that God showers upon us. Could it be, despite the immediate and complete forgiveness of the father, that the younger son could not forgive himself? Could it be that, although the father’s love announces a new beginning to their relationship, the younger son could only cling to the mistakes of the past?

It is clear that the love of the father in the parable is meant to represent God’s love for us, a love which is complete and unlimited. Our only choice is whether we are willing to accept that love and forgiveness or not. We might be aware that through our negligence we have contributed to the breakup of our marriage or placed some heavy burden on one of our children. This parable tells us that God forgives us completely. But will we accept that forgiveness or will we continue to believe that we are broken and incomplete people? Perhaps we know that we have hurt others deeply because of our ambition or the abuse of drugs or alcohol. This parable insists that God’s forgiveness allows a new beginning. But will we live in a new way, or will we continue to define ourselves by the mistakes of the past? We might be struggling with an ongoing habit of sin: impurity, prejudice, self-indulgence. This parable says that God is willing to forgive us over and over again. But will we accept that forgiveness with thankfulness or will we continue to insist that we are not worthy to be God’s daughter or son?

None of us makes it through life with a clean slate. This parable promises that God is willing to wipe our slate clean repeatedly. This is God’s way of saying that, despite our flaws, we have a right to live, we have a right to be happy. The choice is ours. We can draw back and cling to the sins that God has already forgiven, or we can walk into the Father’s embrace, put on the finest robe, accept a ring on our finger, and begin to celebrate in thankfulness with a God whose love knows no end.

Reflection taken from Fr. George Smiga