

Lent 4C.19; Jos 5:9-12; 2Cor 5:17-21; Luke 15:1-32; *Looking for Prodigal Rainbows!*

It has been said,

“When you reduce life to Black & White, you never see Rainbows.” - unk

How well do you and I see?

Lent is about seeing the World, Humanity and Ourselves from God’s point of view. We hear today that some *Pharisees and scribes* complain,

“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Knowing this, Jesus told a parable about Two Sons

This is perhaps the best known and loved of Jesus’ parables. Actually, the entire Gospel is contained in it. **Understand this, and you understand the Gospel.**

But to really understand it one has to experience it.

Some maintain that it is an unfair story. They feel sorry for *the older son*, convinced he got *a raw deal*. They believe the *younger son* got *away with murder*. They maintain that he should have been punished to teach him a lesson.

Let us see about this.... **

The younger son behaved badly - that needs to be said. Demanding his inheritance is tantamount to wishing his father’s death. In this Honor-Shame society he has both disowned & dishonored his own Father. He was determined to have his fling, irrespective of whom he hurt. But when the money ran out, his friends vanished,

... he found himself alone in a foreign country.

However, he soon realizes his mistake. *“Coming to his senses he thought, “How many of my Father’s hired workers have more than enough to eat, but I am dying from hunger.”* His pain made him realize the pain he had caused to his father. So he said: ‘I will go back to my father and tell him I’m sorry.’ It was a brave decision, one that called for a lot of courage to carry it out.

It’s never easy to say *‘I’m sorry’*, even in small matters.

The journey back was a sad, lonely, and fearful one. It’s easy to come back when you’re a hero, laden with trophies. But the prodigal son had no trophies, no achievements with which to earn his Father’s praise and love. He was coming home empty-handed. Worse still, he was coming home burdened with shame and disgrace. That’s never easy. Besides, everything was out of his hands.

Suppose his father didn’t accept him back, what then?!

He deserved to be punished. He knew it and even asked for it.

Yet punishment was the last thing he needed. He had already been punished. He had suffered *desertion by his friends, hunger, loneliness, degradation of soul, the pain of remorse, and the sense of betrayal.*

To sin is to suffer. He didn’t need more punishment.

Nor did he need to be taught a lesson. He had already learned a lesson - *something far more important.* The lessons that really matter in life can’t be taught. They

2 have to be learned. He had learned some very painful truths about himself, about others, and about life. He had eaten forbidden fruit, and far from being satisfied, he was left with a ... *bitter taste in his mouth*. If he had met with rejection it would have destroyed him. *A child needs love, especially when he/she doesn't deserve it.*

What happened? When the Father saw his *lost son* coming towards him, his heart went out to him, and next minute they were in each other's arms.

The Father didn't just accept him back. He *ran* to welcome him back. The biggest discovery the younger son made was that his Father never stopped loving him. **It's an extraordinary experience to be loved ... in your sinfulness.** Those who have experienced *this kind of love know something* about the heart of God. **God loves us not because we are good ... but because God is good.**

Wait just a minute....what about *that older son*?

He is a sad figure. There was a coldness inside him. He was doing all the right things, but had *no joy in his heart*. In refusing to welcome home his brother he showed how lacking he was in the only thing that matters, love. He couldn't find in his heart the generosity ... to reach out a welcoming hand to him.

Instead, he turned inside himself. He began to feel sorry for himself. He acted as *if he was a hired worker, not a son*. The Father dispels that notion immediately by going out to him and saying, **'My son you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But we must rejoice, because your brother ... was dead and has come to life again, he was lost and has been found.'**

(Adapted, **New Sunday & Holy Day Liturgies, F. McCarthy, Lent 4C)

The Father loves *each child uniquely for themselves*. There is NO competition. **Curiously**, we do not know if the older son went to celebrate his brother's return.

Are you a younger son, an older son, or both?

+ Fr. Henri Nouwen tells us that, *From God's perspective, one hidden act of repentance, one little gesture of selfless love, one moment of true forgiveness, is all that is needed to bring God from his throne to run to his returning child and*

... to fill the heavens with sounds of divine joy." (*Return of the Prodigal, +Henri Nouwen, p. 116)

The Father always gives himself away without reserve.

This is a love that is indescribable, undefinable, and incomprehensible.

At this Liturgy of the Prodigal, we discover that we have, *"a God who suffers with us."* **Moreover, we are called to become the Father,**

the one who forgives,

the one who welcomes,

the one who offers compassion.

The One who sees beyond the Black & White to the Rainbow within.

Will you enter into the Father's joy?

What does Jesus, our *older brother*, do?