

DEACON GEORGE'S HOMILY FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT



The story of the Prodigal Son, is probably one of the most well-known stories in the Gospels. It is a story about a sinner who repents of his sinful ways. But this story is a double-edged parable, because there are two sinners, the younger son and

the elder son. The younger son demanded his hereditary share of the family property, which was only one third. But since there were two sons, the eldest son always received a double share, hence two thirds for him.

The younger son immediately turned his share into cash and wasted it in a foreign land. He abandoned the three main aspects of his life, by abandoning his family, his nation, and his religion. He left his family, to live among foreigners, and worked among pigs, showing total disrespect for his religion.

Whereas, the elder son served his father daily, but only through a sense of duty, and not through any sense of love. The words he used, revealed his absence of love, because he rudely omitted the respectful address “*father*”, and called his brother “*your son*”.

This son was a jealous man, who resented his father’s loving grace to his wayward brother. He prided himself on his own merits and he complained that his father had never giving him so much as a kid, that he might celebrate with his friends. But one wonders, did the older son have any friends to celebrate with?

The younger son represented the publicans and sinners. Whereas, the elder son represented the scribes and Pharisees, who criticised Jesus’ acceptance of the publicans and sinners. These scribes and Pharisees wanted Jesus to discriminate between **the deserving** (themselves), and the **undeserving** (the publicans and sinners). They thought there should **never** be any celebrations for prodigal sons, there should be **discipline** instead.

The younger son’s repentance grew out of his sense of misery and need, which made him decide to return home with this confession, “*Father, I have sinned against heaven, and against you*”. The word “*father*” is a respectful address. The word “*heaven*” is a reverential Jewish substitute, for the sacrosanct word “*God*”. And the words “*against you*” is an admission of guilt, first: in relation to God, and second: in relation to his father.

This **confession**, was to be followed by a plea to be restored only as a paid servant, realizing that he had no claim on his family, on his nation, or on God. Then **finally**, he would ask his father for mercy.

But he underestimated his father's love, just as we all underestimate the love of God the Father. Because when the father saw his son returning, he **ran** to meet him. Now **running** was unusual and undignified for an elderly Jewish man. But the father's love and joy, overpowered his sense of decorum, meaning that God the Father, also, forgets his dignity, in a burst of joy, when a sinner turns in repentance to him. And the father's **kiss** signified **forgiveness**.

The son began to blurt out his prepared confession. But, before he could come to the part about being taken back as a paid servant, the father interrupted him, with commands to clothe him with the best robe, as a sign of honour, and put on a ring on his hand, as a sign of restored filial authority, authority even greater than before, and put shoes on his feet, to signify a freeman, and not a paid servant, and finally kill the fatted calf, for a banquet of celebration.

This parable of the prodigal son, shows us what a really loving, compassionate, and forgiving God we have. Because if we decide that we want to give up our sinful ways, and say sorry from the depths of our hearts, we need only to walk towards God, and no matter how far away we are, he will race towards us, to welcome us, with open arms, embrace us, and kiss us.

God the Father, is waiting in his starting blocks ready to race towards us, and heaven is waiting to rejoice over each and every one of us, for that moment when we repent.

Repentance, is not simply feeling sorry, or a changing of mind, it is a turning round, a metanoia, a complete alteration of the basic motivation and direction of our life.

Only **we** can decide to turn and walk to Christ. Only one step towards him will suffice. But we have problems with making this step:

First: We can't believe he loves us so much.

Second: We can't believe, because we think that we don't deserve his love.

Rubbish! God the Father does not give a hoot what we have done in the past. He will run towards every one of us, no matter who we are, even to President Putin, if he makes that step. The decision, time and place, is ours to make.