

Meditations: Saturday of the Second Week of Lent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this Lenten season.

- The emptiness of the younger son
- The love of the father
- The freedom of the elder son

THE PHARISEES and Scribes were murmuring among themselves. They were upset to see our Lord meeting with public sinners. But Jesus, who knew their thoughts, decided to tell three parables so that they would better understand what God's love is

truly like. First, He recounted the parable of the shepherd who abandons his flock to recover the lost sheep (cf. *Lk 15:4-7*). Then, that of the woman who searches through her house until she finds the lost drachma (cf. *Lk 15:8-10*). Finally, He told a longer story: that of the prodigal son and the merciful father (cf. *Lk 15:11-32*).

There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them (*Lk 15:11-12*). After collecting his inheritance he went off to a distant country. He wanted a complete change in his life, since he couldn't stand the discipline in his father's home. He thought that by giving free rein to his passions he would finally find the happiness he longed for. Nevertheless, as soon as his fortune was spent he experienced loneliness

and boredom again. “The feeling that this was still not true life became ever more acute; indeed, by continuing doing all these things, life drifted further and further away. Everything became empty: the slavery of doing the same things then also re-emerged.”^[1] —

He became so desperate that he started tending pigs and *was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate (Lk 15:16)*. Finally, *when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!’ (Lk 15:17)*. And getting up he set out for his father’s house. “Human life is in some way a constant returning to our Father’s house,” Saint Josemaría said. “We return through contrition, through the conversion of heart which means a desire to change, a firm decision to improve our life and which, therefore, is expressed in sacrifice

and self-giving. We return to our Father's house by means of that sacrament of pardon in which, by confessing our sins, we put on Jesus Christ again and become his brothers, members of God's family.”^[2] —

EVER SINCE his younger son left, the father was no longer at peace. He would often wonder: “What will have become of him? Where will he be now? Is he all right?” Every day he went up to the terrace hoping to see his son coming back down the road. Thus the months passed until one day he saw someone approaching the property. Although that person was still far away, the father was certain: it was his son. *His father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him (Lk 15:21).*

The love in the father's heart was waiting for this moment. That is why he is unable to restrain himself. When the son begins his prepared speech to ask for forgiveness – “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you ” – he doesn't even seem to be listening. He isn't interested in nice words. The only thing he wants to do is to celebrate joyfully. *Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate (Lk 15:22-23).* He doesn't want his son to live with the constant memory of his past sins. “The Father could have said: ‘Fine, son, come back home, get back to work, go to your room, and get ready to start working again.’ And this would have been a good way to forgive. But no! God does not know how to forgive without celebrating! And the Father celebrates because of

the joy he has on seeing his son once more with him.”^[3] —

Experiencing his father’s embrace, the son realizes that the happiness of being with his father is much greater than what any other pleasures could provide. And he is also more secure, because not even his sins have prevented him from regaining it.

“Yes, you are right: how great is your wretchedness! By your own efforts, where would you be now, where would you have ended up? You admitted: ‘Only a Love that was full of mercy could keep on loving me.’ Be consoled. He will not deny you his Love or his Mercy, if you seek him.”^[4] —

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DURING all this time the elder son had remained at home. He spent his days working on the property, attentive to his father’s needs. But

often, especially when the day's work was more intense, he couldn't stop his imagination from going to where his brother was. At times, he even feels guilty for wanting to leave his father's house. But he knows that he can't leave; he has to meet all the expectations that fall on his shoulders as the only son now.

Perhaps he was absorbed in these thoughts when, returning from a day of hard work in the fields, he heard music and songs in the distance. Surprised, he asked one of the farm hands what was going on. *Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound (Lk 15:27)*. He was so upset that he refused to take part in the celebration. When his father came to look for him he complained: *Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat,*

that I might celebrate with my friends (Lk 15:29).

The father was hurt to see that his son wasn't happy, that he fulfilled his obligations with a legalistic mindset: "I have obeyed you, so I deserve a reward." But the father doesn't criticize or reproach his son for this attitude. He simply answers: *Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours (Lk 15:31).* As the Prelate of Opus Dei stressed: "It is not by emancipating ourselves from the Father's house that we become free, but rather by embracing the reality that we are sons or daughters."^[5] Living freely in the Father's house involves much more than a fattened calf. We can ask our Mother to teach us how to savor the reality that we are children, eager to return to the Father's embrace as often as necessary.

[1] Benedict XVI, Homily, 18 March 2007.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 64.

[3] Francis, Angelus, 27 March 2022.

[4] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 897.

[5] Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 9 January 2018, no. 4.

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