

A Father had Two Sons

By: Fr. Joseph Pellegino

We've heard this parable so many times that I'm sure all most of us can recite the story word for word. But the parable is not a simple story. It contains a deep discussion of God's forgiveness, His mercy and His love.

The Prodigal Son is not just a child who made bad choices. That's our modern way of describing sin: he or she made a bad choice. That is such a nice and sanitized way of viewing sin: He made a bad choice. No, going to a restaurant and ordering brussel sprouts with tomato sauce is a bad choice. What the prodigal son did was far worse than just a bad choice. He rejected his responsibilities towards his father and mother. The land was sacred to the Jewish people. It was the promised land given to the Chosen People. Each parcel of land was holy. To sell the land was to reject God's gift. That is why the farmer Naboth refused to sell his land to King Ahab in the Old Testament, "The LORD forbid," Naboth said, "that I should give you my ancestral heritage." The son, in selling his father's property, was giving up a portion of his family's heritage.

All sin is a squandering of the heritage that God has given us. People cheat on their marriages and squander the gifts of God's love. They then have to face life without the love of husband or wife or without the closeness of their children, all lost as wages of sin. Business people cut a corner here and there and pocket that which is not theirs, and squander their careers. We priests give up marriage and put in long and difficult hours, we hold the hands of the dying at three in the morning, but when we sin, the view of our sin clouds any good we may have done.

The son also sinned against his father, and his mother. He violated his obligation to care for his parents. Ancient social security basically consisted in sons working their father's land until their parents died. Even if the father gave them their inheritance ahead of time, they were still obliged to use this to care for their parents. The prodigal didn't just sell something that was his. He sold his parents' social security.

The context of the story is within other parables of rejoicing at that which is found. God is interested in finding what was lost....a lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son. God is interested in healing. Many times people take the attitude that what they have done is so terrible that God cannot forgive them. There is no limit to God's mercy and forgiveness to the sincerer penitent. He views the child returning home, not the inheritance squandered. Perhaps our problem is that we have incorrect concepts of ourselves and our God. We are not so great that we can hurt God. Nor is there anything we can do that is beyond God's ability to forgive. Perhaps the problem is that we refuse to forgive ourselves and then transfer this to God. God is infinitely greater than we are, and infinitely more merciful. Perhaps the problem

is that we have to be humble enough to recognize that we need God's forgiveness to be whole.

The banquet that the father give son symbolizes the warmth of God's love. It is the heavenly banquet. At the conclusion of the story, everyone is enjoying God's love and warmth, everyone is enjoying the banquet, everyone—except the elder brother. He refuses to forgive. His grudge becomes a sin itself. He excludes himself from the banquet of God's love. That is what we all do when we sin. We exclude ourselves from the banquet of God's love. The elder brother is so self righteousness, so full of himself that he suffers the result of his hatred. He would rather pout outside the banquet than come in and have some veal. We often do the same thing. We would rather harbor a grudge, then give it up and enjoy the gifts of love God has for us.

We all have battle stories. We have all been offended by others without just cause. We have all been hurt. But we make the situation worse by refusing to let go of the hurt. We treasure our own hatred like misers, ready to fight anyone who would deny us the right to be miserable. And this hatred destroys us. A parishioner once wrote me: "I am too old to engage in what Florida has become famous for: old folks fighting over problems within condo associations that most haven't the slightest knowledge of. They have mistaken the golden years for the golden glove years." Their hatred destroys their ability to enjoy the few years they have left before their lifestyles are limited by sickness and age. Often when I prepare young people for marriage, I'll mention. "Plan your party, your reception, and enjoy it. But be convinced that you cannot guarantee that everyone will have a good time. Some relatives may show up who want to continue hostilities with other relatives. They are only hurting themselves, and they will miss enjoying a great party."

Our god is a God of inclusion, not exclusion. Like, the shepherd who finds the lost sheep and the widow who finds the lost silver piece, God rejoices when one of his loved ones is once more included with his people. But when we refuse to let go of hurts, we exclude ourselves from his joy. The parable that we have heard so many times is very rich. It speaks about the deep effects of sin, the self destruction of hatred and the infinite mercy of God. We pray today that we allow God's love and forgiveness into our lives. And we ask God for the courage to extend this forgiveness to others.

And when you are really upset with that person who hurt you, remember, "It is better to eat veal than to pout."

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READINGS OF THE WEEK

Exodus 32:7-14

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Luke 15:1-32

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「亡羊」與「失錢」的比喻

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經文脈絡

路加福音十五章記載大家耳熟能詳的比喻：「亡羊」(3-7)、「失錢」(8-10)、「浪子回頭」(11-32)。這三個內容相關，都有相同的主題：遺失和找到(迷失和尋回)、邀請大家一起歡樂。前兩個比喻具有平行對稱的結構，第三個比喻在結構上和思想發展上都比較獨特。

這個主日福音分長式和短式，長式包含路加福音十五章整章的內容，短式則只包含前兩個比喻(1-10)。由於教會已將「浪子回頭」的比喻(11-32) 安排在四旬期第四主日誦讀，因此我們這裡只針對前兩個比喻稍作詮釋。

經文分析

整段敘述分為三段，首先是對於當時情況的描述 (1-2)，接著是「迷失的羊」的比喻(3-7)，最後是「失錢」的比喻(8-10)。兩個比喻的結尾都是耶穌自己提供的結論，當然也是整個敘述的最高峰。

耶穌親近罪人

比喻的開始是對於當時情況的描述：「眾稅吏及罪人們都來接近耶穌，為聽祂講道。法利塞人及經師們竊竊私議說：『這個人交接罪人，又同他們吃飯。』」由於法利塞人和經師一向排斥和罪人有任何關係，因此也批評耶穌和罪人來往的態度。在這個情況下耶穌必須為自己的態度和行動辯護，祂給法利塞人及經師們講了這些比喻，籍以說明祂和罪人結交往來是正確的。

兩種對立的態度

路加非常強烈地表達這兩種對立的態度：「稅吏和罪人」開放自己，前來聆聽耶穌講道；而自以為虔誠的「法利塞人和經師們」卻批評耶穌的態度。這兩種對立的態度不僅是接續前一章已開始的主題（路十四 13、21），更是整部路加福音的基本關懷之一，路加多次敘述耶穌「和罪人與稅吏交往，與他們同席用餐」，這是表達天主寬恕這些罪人的記號(路五 27-32;七 34)。

亡羊的比喻

面對法利塞人以及經師們的批評，耶穌的第一個回應是向他們講述了「亡羊」的比喻。耶穌首先描述一個情境，並由此而提出一個問題：「你們中間有那個人有一百隻羊，遺失了其中的一隻，而不把這九十九隻丟在荒野，去尋覓那遺失的一隻，直到找著呢？」

耶穌時代的猶太人大多以游牧為生，因此當時的聽眾非常熟悉這個問題所描寫的情境。牧人在曠野裡牧放羊群，難免會有羊脫離羊群而迷失在曠野中，這樣的羊面臨生命的威脅，這時每一個牧人都會盡力尋找這迷失的羊，「直到找到為止」。牧人找到迷失的羊時，他的喜樂是如此的強大，以致於不僅把所尋回的羊「放在肩上」帶回來，並且必須邀請朋友和鄰人一起來分享：「你們與我同樂罷！因為我那隻遺失的羊，又找到了。」

失錢的比喻

第二個比喻沒有任何前導的引言，直接被加在後面，這個比喻所描述的情況也是聽眾都能輕易領悟的。主角是一位貧窮的婦女，全部財產僅有十個價值不高的「達瑪」，因此每一分錢對她而言都十分珍貴。當她遺失任何一個小錢時，自然費盡心力找尋。比喻描述在她找到所遺失的「達瑪」時，和尋回亡羊的牧人一樣，獲得極大的喜樂而必須和人分享：於是「她就請女友及鄰人來說：你們與我同樂罷！因為我失去的那一個『達瑪』又找到了。」

比喻的結論

耶穌以相當隆重的方式為這兩個比喻做出結論：「我告訴你們……」，這些人重新找回失物所得到的喜樂是一個象徵，使當時的聽眾明白，一個罪人的悔改將為天庭帶來極大的喜樂，天主將和祂的使者們一起歡樂慶祝。

綜合反省

耶穌透過這兩個產生於日常生活經驗的比喻，引導當時的每一個聽眾正確瞭解祂和罪人來往的態度，使他們不再消極地輕視判斷耶穌，而積極地明白耶穌的行動是天主的愛的表現。路加非常巧妙地處理了他手中的材料，特別強調人們因找尋所遺失的東西而有的喜樂，以及和朋友們共同分享的歡樂。

這兩個比喻非常具有耶穌宣講的特色。路加透過這個故事不僅教導初期教會的、以及今日的讀者，明白耶穌為什麼特別親近罪人，而更鼓勵所有的基督徒學習耶穌滿懷愛心地走近罪人，在教會中不要自我中心地輕視任何人，並且和天主一起為了罪人的悔改而歡樂。

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