

Sunday, September 15, 2019

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14

Responsorial: Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 17, 19

2nd Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Gospel: Luke 15:1-32

The Parable of the Prodigal Son, A Reflection of the Extravagant Mercy of God

He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. (Luke 15:20)

This beloved story is usually called “the parable of the prodigal son.” But what if we looked at it as a story of a prodigal father instead?

We may not want to call the father “prodigal.” After all, the word means extravagant or excessive, like someone throwing away his money with both hands. That’s clearly what the younger son did, and we don’t like it.

But the father is prodigal. First, he freely gives his younger son his inheritance years before the proper time. Then, maybe more important, when this son returns, he is exceedingly prodigal in welcoming him back: the finest robe, a ring, new sandals, and a great feast, to top it all off. It’s no wonder the older son got upset! How could his father be so free with his gifts? How could he be so glad to accept that wasteful, irresponsible son back into his home?

This prodigal father can disturb us too. It’s hard to understand how or why he could welcome his wayward son back into full status as a child and heir. We might think that for the sake of fairness, the father should have made the young man pay back what he had squandered or suffer some other kind of consequence for his actions before he could be forgiven. But that would be misunderstanding mercy.

The father in this parable gives us a glimpse of our heavenly Father. He sent Jesus to pour out his entire self—lavishly—to welcome us back home. In everything he said and did, Jesus revealed God’s shockingly generous mercy, a mercy that is available to each one of us. It’s a mercy that doesn’t hold a grudge. It’s a mercy that waits patiently for us to begin our return. It’s a mercy that eagerly welcomes us home.

This is the mercy that God has for you—and for everyone around you.

“Thank you, Father, for your extravagant mercy. Thank you for running out to meet each person who comes back to you. Even me.”

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading opens with these words: *The LORD said to Moses, "Go down at once to your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, for they have become depraved. They have soon turned aside from the way I pointed out to them, making for themselves a molten calf and worshiping it, sacrificing to it and crying out, 'This is your God, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!' "I see how stiff-necked this people is, " continued the LORD to Moses. Let me alone, then, that my wrath may blaze up against them to consume them. Then I will make of you a great nation.*
 - Why do you think the LORD was so angry at the people of Israel and called them a *stiff-necked* people?
 - What are some areas of your life that have the potential to be (or are) "idols"? How can you overcome them?
2. The responsorial psalm speaks of David's cry for the forgiveness and the mercy of God: *Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me. A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Cast me not out from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.*
 - What do you think David meant, when after pleading for mercy, he said, *A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me?*
 - How can you take more advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation to receive a *clean heart* and *steadfast spirit*?
 - After receiving this sacrament, how do you *proclaim your praise* to God for having received his forgiveness?
3. In the second reading, St. Paul describes his previous condition this way: *I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and arrogant ... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am the foremost.* He went on to say these words: *But for that reason I was mercifully treated, so that in me, as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in him for everlasting life.*
 - In what ways was Paul's life, a witness and *an example* to others of the fact that he, *the foremost* of sinners, had received God's mercy?
 - How might the witness of your life, and your service to God and the Church, be seen as an example to others of God's love and mercy?
 - How willing are you to tell others of God's love and mercy in Jesus Christ, and its impact on your life? What holds you back from doing it?
4. The Gospel reading includes the parable of the prodigal son. The father speaks these words upon the return of his prodigal son: *Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.* It ends with these words by the father to the older son who refused to join in the celebration for the younger son's return: *My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.*
 - How would you describe the difference in the words the father spoke on the return of his prodigal son, and the words he spoke to his older son?
 - Like the prodigal son, how have you valued what God the Father could do for you more than you valued your relationship of love and intimacy with him?
 - What is your level of hope and trust in your heavenly Father's love for all members of your family?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the parable of the prodigal son. It ends with these words: "The father in this parable gives us a glimpse of our heavenly Father. He sent Jesus to pour out his entire self—lavishly—to welcome us back home. In everything he said and did, Jesus revealed God's shockingly generous mercy, a mercy that is available to each one of us. It's a mercy that doesn't hold a grudge. It's a mercy that waits patiently for us to begin our return. It's a mercy that eagerly welcomes us home. This is the mercy that God has for you—and for everyone around you."
 - What are the ways in which "The father in this parable gives us a glimpse of our heavenly Father"?
 - In what ways is God's entire relationship with us based on love and mercy and forgiveness, whether it is forgiveness for the big sins of the prodigal son, or the minor sins committed by his brother?
 - How can you better respond to God's love and mercy and forgiveness?

Take some time now to pray and thank your heavenly Father for the great mercy and forgiveness he has poured out on you. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

"Thank you, Father, for your extravagant mercy. Thank you for running out to meet each person who comes back to you. Even me."

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Word of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry.]