

Reconciliation Homily by Deacon Bill Kester

Gospel Reading Luke 15:11-32 The Parable of the Lost Son

Then he said, "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them.

After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.

When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need.

So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine.

And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any.

Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger.

I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.'"

So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.

His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.'

But his father ordered his servants, '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.' Then the celebration began.

Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing.

He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean.

The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him.

He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.'

He said to him, '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.'"

-The Gospel of the Lord (By the words of the Gospel, may our sins be wiped away.)

Perhaps the most misunderstood of the seven sacraments is Reconciliation. Instead of approaching this sacrament as the grace-filled celebration of love & forgiveness, we too often approach this beautiful gift as some sort of guilt laden, mechanical accounting of our sins. Luke's parable of the Prodigal Son gives us insight into the Celebratory nature of this sacrament. "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."

Why celebrate??? Because God loves us lavishly and with reckless abandon. In fact, by human measures, God's love is incomprehensible. Look at how poorly the younger son treated the Father in this parable. By asking for his inheritance while his Father was still alive, the younger son was essentially stating that he wished his Father was dead. The actions of the younger son were incredibly dishonorable toward the father. And despite the insulting, careless, & hurtful treatment the Father endured by the words and actions of the younger son, look at how the Father reacted. " While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.

Among the biggest reasons why Reconciliation is so important, so needed, so beneficial is our own humanity. For starters, our humanity is such a big part of our faith lives, of our relationship with God, that Jesus came to show us how to be the most human, living with us for 33 years, ending in his Passion , Death, & Resurrection. It's exactly our humanity that makes Reconciliation such an important gift from God.

Because we're human, the certainty of absolution in the sacrament is so restorative, so medicinal, so therapeutic for our souls. Because we're human, we tend to avoid sin after coming out of Reconciliation, a time when our souls are as clean as snow. Because we're human, we feel shame. Reconciliation demolishes shame, that insidious poison that builds up in

us in a way similar to how a frog can find itself in boiling water, water that might have been cool initially, but slowly became deadly-hot unbeknownst to the frog. In much the same way, as our sins accumulate, our shame builds, until we're so laden with it that the thought of confessing our sins, becomes problematic for us.

In Genesis Chapter 2 we hear: "So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked. When they heard the sound of the Lord God, the man and his wife hid themselves."

Fortunately for us, God doesn't love like humans love. Parables after parables tell us of God's irrational love when judged by human measures. So he gave us the sacrament of reconciliation to do what its name implies, reconcile us to him, by removing that which separates us from him, our sins. It's this opportunity which is before you now.

Even though we may still be a long way off, God's already running to meet us & he's got the fattened calf on the spit.

As with most aspects of our relationship with God, we have to take the first step. We have to get over ourselves. On his road to forgiveness, The Prodigal Son took the first step. "Coming to his senses he thought... I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you." So let's take that first step, and let's enjoy the spiritual feast that follows.