



## THE PRODIGAL FATHER

(LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32)

*Stained glass window in the Church of St Andrew in Antwerp, Belgium, depicting Jesus and the parable of the prodigal son*

**Our gospel reading today is set in the context of the critics of Jesus muttering that he is associating with people whom the authorities consider less than acceptable, namely “tax collectors and sinners”.**

The former were unpopular as they were regarded as collaborators with the Roman occupiers, and anyone who was not observing the proper religious customs was deemed to be a “sinner”. This did not mean that the person concerned was particularly immoral but simply that, for some reason or other, they were not fulfilling the requirements of the Law. Yet these are the people who are responding positively to Jesus and his message. Jesus shares food with them, a clear signal in that culture that they are welcomed and accepted by him and, by implication, by God. His critics understand the significance of his actions and that is what infuriates them.

Jesus uses the parable of the lost son to illustrate the meaning of his action and of his message. A better title for this well-beloved story would be “The Prodigal Father”. The word “prodigal” is not common and many people think that it means repentant or regretful, but in fact the basic meaning is wasteful. It is not the irresponsible young man who is the centre of the story; rather, it is the anxious parent who has been looking out for his return, who casts aside his own dignity to rush to meet him, who won’t listen to any words of apology, who throws an extravagant party to welcome him home. Jesus tells us that this is God’s attitude towards those who have made a mess of their lives, and that all that God can say is “Welcome home!” ■

### SAY

**The father ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly**  
(Luke 15:20)

### LEARN

Jesus’ critics are usually members of the religious establishment.

Tax collectors were unpopular as they were regarded as collaborators with the occupying Roman authorities.

The term “sinners” covered anyone who did not, or could not, observe the Law properly: it did not necessarily imply serious moral failings.

### DO

Examine your conscience about your Lenten resolution: does your penance help you to feel closer to God and make you more aware of God’s presence?

### REFLECT

**T**he parables are traps: we are told a story and invited to make a judgement. Then Jesus says, “That’s all very well, but have you thought about it from this point of view?” Many of us may sympathise with the elder brother, who has kept all the rules, obeyed his father and feels aggrieved at the welcome extended to his errant sibling on the latter’s return.

What emerges from the dialogue between the father and the elder son is that there is little affection on the part of the son: he won’t go into the house where the welcome party is taking place; he talks about “slaving” for his father and never disobeying him; he refers to the other young man as “this son of yours” rather than “my brother”. So all that his faithful observance has done is to turn him into an embittered person, at odds with everyone else.

We note that the story is left unfinished. The father pleads with him to change his mind and attitude. Whether he does or not is left up to the reader. Each of us is invited to finish the narrative for ourselves. But the real question which Jesus is asking is “What would you do?” This is part of our Lenten challenge. ■

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her.  
Be joyful, all who were in mourning;  
exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast.

**COLLECT**

O God, who through your Word  
reconcile the human race to yourself in a  
wonderful way,  
grant, we pray,  
that with prompt devotion and eager faith  
the Christian people may hasten  
toward the solemn celebrations to come.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING**

Joshua 5:9-12

A reading from the book of Joshua.

The Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have taken  
the shame of Egypt away from you."

The Israelites pitched their camp at Gilgal  
and kept the Passover there on the fourteenth  
day of the month, at evening in the plain  
of Jericho. On the morrow of the Passover  
they tasted the produce of that country,  
unleavened bread and roasted ears of corn,  
that same day. From that time, from their  
first eating of the produce of that country, the  
manna stopped falling. And having manna  
no longer, the Israelites fed from that year  
onwards on what the land of Canaan yielded.

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Psalm 33

Response:

**Taste and see that the Lord is good.**

- I will bless the Lord at all times,  
his praise always on my lips;  
in the Lord my soul shall make its boast.  
The humble shall hear and be glad. (R.)
- Glorify the Lord with me.  
Together let us praise his name.  
I sought the Lord and he answered me;  
from all my terrors he set me free. (R.)
- Look towards him and be radiant;  
let your faces not be abashed.  
This poor man called; the Lord heard him  
and rescued him from all his distress. (R.)

**SECOND READING**2 Corinthians  
5:17-21

A reading from the second letter of St Paul to  
the Corinthians.

For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new  
creation; the old creation has gone, and  
now the new one is here. It is all God's  
work. It was God who reconciled us to  
himself through Christ and gave us the work  
of handing on his reconciliation. In other  
words, God in Christ was reconciling the  
world to himself, not holding men's faults  
against them, and he has entrusted to us  
the news that they are reconciled. So we  
are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though  
God were appearing through us, and the  
appeal that we make in Christ's name is: be  
reconciled to God. For our sake God made

the sinless one into sin, so that in him we  
might become the goodness of God.

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

**Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus!  
I will leave this place and go to my father and  
say:**

**"Father, I have sinned against heaven and  
against you."**

**Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus!**

**GOSPEL**

Luke 15:1-3. 11-32

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
Luke.

The tax collectors and the sinners were all  
seeking the company of Jesus to hear what  
he had to say, and the Pharisees and the  
scribes complained. "This man" they said  
"welcomes sinners and eats with them." So  
he spoke this parable to them:

"A man had two sons. The younger said  
to his father, 'Father, let me have the share  
of the estate that would come to me.' So the  
father divided the property between them. A  
few days later, the younger son got together  
everything he had and left for a distant  
country where he squandered his money on  
a life of debauchery.

"When he had spent it all, that country  
experienced a severe famine, and now he  
began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself  
out to one of the local inhabitants who put  
him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he  
would willingly have filled his belly with the  
husks the pigs were eating but no one offered  
him anything. Then he came to his senses  
and said, 'How many of my father's paid  
servants have more food than they want, and  
here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this  
place and go to my father and say: Father, I  
have sinned against heaven and against you;  
I no longer deserve to be called your son;  
treat me as one of your paid servants.' So he  
left the place and went back to his father.

"While he was still a long way off, his  
father saw him and was moved with pity.  
He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms  
and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said,  
'Father, I have sinned against heaven and  
against you. I no longer deserve to be called  
your son.' But the father said to his servants,  
'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it  
on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals  
on his feet. Bring the calf we have been  
fattening, and kill it: we are going to have  
a feast, a celebration, because this son of  
mine was dead and has come back to life;  
he was lost and is found.' And they began to  
celebrate.

"Now the elder son was out in the fields,  
and on his way back, as he drew near the  
house, he could hear music and dancing.  
Calling one of the servants he asked what  
it was all about. 'Your brother has come'  
replied the servant 'and your father has killed  
the calf we had fattened because he has got  
him back safe and sound.' He was angry then  
and refused to go in, and his father came  
out to plead with him; but he answered his  
father, 'Look, all these years I have slaved for  
you and never once disobeyed your orders,  
yet you never offered me so much as a kid  
for me to celebrate with my friends. But

for this son of yours, when he comes back  
after swallowing up your property – he and  
his women – you kill the calf we had been  
fattening.'

"The father said, 'My son, you are with  
me always and all I have is yours. But it is  
only right we should celebrate and rejoice,  
because your brother here was dead and has  
come to life; he was lost and is found.'"

The Gospel of the Lord.  
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

**I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,**

*(all bow during the next two lines)*

**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended into hell;  
on the third day he rose again from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of God the  
Father almighty;  
from there he will come to judge the living  
and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting.**

Amen.

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

We place before you with joy these offerings,  
which bring eternal remedy, O Lord,  
praying that we may both faithfully revere  
them  
and present them to you, as is fitting,  
for the salvation of all the world.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

**You must rejoice, my son,  
for your brother was dead and has come  
to life;  
he was lost and is found.**

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

O God, who enlighten everyone who comes  
into this world,  
illuminate our hearts, we pray,  
with the splendour of your grace,  
that we may always ponder  
what is worthy and pleasing to your majesty  
and love you in all sincerity.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**PRAYER OVER THE PEOPLE**

Look upon those who call to you, O Lord,  
and sustain the weak;  
give life by your unfailing light  
to those who walk in the shadow of death,  
and bring those rescued by your mercy from  
every evil  
to reach the highest good.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.