

Lent 4            3/31/19  
Luke 15:11-32 C

## SERMON TEXT IS THE APPOINTED GOSPEL FOR THIS SUNDAY, FROM THE 15<sup>TH</sup> CHAPTER OF LUKE'S GOSPEL

Dysfunctional. That is the word that we like to use today. And, you don't need to be Dr. Phil to look at the family in our Gospel and say that is a dysfunctional family.

Look at this younger son. He goes to his father and demands, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to come (v. 12).' According to the custom of the day, the younger son would receive 1/3 of the property. The older son would inherit 2/3 of the property – when dad was dead. But, dad is not dead. Dad is very much alive.

But that didn't stop this younger son from going his dad, and saying, "Give me my stuff. I want it and I want it now." What he's really saying to his father is, "You're dead to me." This son is rude, selfish, self-centered, and obnoxious. But, you know what's really amazing? His dad acts like he's dead. So, he divides the property up and the younger son has money to burn. He can't wait to get to the bright lights of the big city, so he sets off for a far country. The Evangelist doesn't tell us what country he goes to, but it's a fair guess that what happens there, stays there. This is a land of immorality, sensuality, idolatry, envy and division, fits of rage, jealousy and greed, anger, drunkenness. He went to the big city and lived it up. He burned through his money and found himself broke. Homeless. He does something a good Jewish boy would never even think of doing – he hired himself out to feed pigs. Nobody would give him a thing.

He hit rock bottom. And he got to thinking, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with

hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants (vv. 17-19).’ His words sound wonderful, repentance, but his words express a mixed bag. Notice that when he goes back to the father, he demands, he expects, his father to take him back on his terms, “Treat me as one of your hired servants”.

You can understand this younger son, his thinking and his sentiment, because you expect, you even demand, God treat you according to your terms. You’ve said to God, “Give me what I’ve got coming, and give it to me now! I have my life and I want to live it now!” What you’re really saying is, “You’re as good as dead to me, God.” Know the marvelous thing about the Lord our God? He has, and He does. He has opened His Fatherly hand and given you all kinds of blessings of body and soul. And you’ve taken those good gifts of God and blown them on immorality, sensuality, idolatry; in envy and fits of rage, drunkenness. The world’s goods that money can buy always promise pleasure and treasure. You’ve burned through it all; tried it all; and you find yourself broke – not maybe financially, but emotionally, spiritually; empty, lacking joy and peace. How many times have you sinned against God and you turn to Him in repentance to say, “I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son, your daughter.” Take me back, but, BUT...I still want my anger, my bitterness, envy, my lust, my evil desire, my greed, my jealousy, my refusal to forgive and be reconciled. Take me back, Father, BUT... on my terms.

Notice that in our lesson the Father has not yet spoken one, single word. He is just there, waiting for his son and daughters to come to him.

He sees his son, feels compassion for him, and shows that compassion by running to he, embracing him, and kissing him. The Father will not accept his son back on his son's terms – he is not about to treat his son as a hired servant. He accepts you back on his terms. It is fitting to celebrate and be glad, for his son was dead, but now alive; once he was lost, but now is found.

The father's terms are these: He welcomes His son home, puts the best robe on him, puts a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. He kills the fattened calf, to eat and celebrate. And those are the Father's terms for you, Dear Child of God. For though you had wasted the good gifts of God in prodigal, wasteful, living, He does not treat you as your sins deserve. He has compassion you. He clothes you with the best robe – the robe of His Son's own righteousness. He gives you something much better than a ring for your finger, He gives you a ring for you head – the crown of eternal life. As shoes for your feet, He gives you the readiness given by the Gospel of peace (cf. Eph 6:15). And, he welcomes you to the celebration of the marriage feast of the Lamb in heaven to feast at forever and ever without end.

Those are yours – not because of the sincerity of your sorrow over sin, nor the depth of your shame – these are yours His Son of God was stripped of His robe, and stood exposed for all the world to see. He was not given a ring, but a crown of thorns. He had no shoes, just a nail driven through His feet to pin Him to the wood of the cross. The Son bore the sins of the world – all the times you squandered God's good gifts, all the times you lived as though it were your life; all the times God was as good as dead to you. Jesus suffered and died for all that. And because He did, you are forgiven.

God your Father washes you clean in the waters of your baptism. Once you were dead in sin, but now you are alive in Christ. Once, you were lost in sin, but now the Good Shepherd has found and carried you home to His flock. And, invites you to the celebration of His feast, where He feeds you with His life-giving Body and Blood, a foretaste of the feast of the Lamb in heaven.

Then, there is that older brother, who it seems did not hesitate to take 2/3 of his father's property, even when his father was not dead. He hears the sound of the celebration, and is filled with jealousy, anger, rage, "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. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him (vv. 29-30)!" These are the older brother's terms. He compares himself, and thinks himself better than his younger brother because of his works, his accomplishments, and what he has not done. And, so his terms are that his father should be grateful and reward him.

Once again, Dear Saints of God, we see the Father's terms. The father's love is not based on who his sons are and what his sons do -- their works -- what they have done, or not done. The father's love is based on who He is; and because He is, by nature, a loving, compassionate father, he loves both his sons despite their sins.

The Father's terms are that He receives you for the sake of Jesus and makes you new in Jesus so that you may be a living reflection of the Savior and His welcoming love to your neighbor. As He forgave you all your sins, you forgive your neighbor. As He remembers your sins no more, you keep no record of your neighbor's wrongs. As Christ sympathizes with

you in your weaknesses, you bear you neighbor's burdens, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep, and always giving witness for the hope we have in Jesus.

Our parable this morning teaches us that God does not deal with us on our terms. Which is good news for us, because that means for us that He does not treat us as our sins deserve. He deals with us on His term – and His term is grace, grace in our Lord Jesus Christ.