



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

4th Sunday in Lent Year C

The Prodigal Son

Readings: Joshua 5:9-12, Ps 33, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

'It ain't much I'm asking, if you want the truth

Here's to the future

Hear the cry of youth (hear the cry of youth) (hear the cry of youth)

I want it all, I want it all, I want it all and I want it now.'

Those of us who were still young in 1989 will recall those lyrics set to the thundering guitar chords of Brian May in the famous Queen single of that name. The lead singer, the remarkable Freddie Mercury, was already dying and would never get to perform it onstage. It would become an anthem of excess and an epitaph for our culture. Instant gratification and its consequence.

Actually, of course, it's nothing new. In today's Gospel story we hear the same lyrics from the younger son.

He wants his share of the estate, he wants it all and he wants it now.

We have become familiar with the mantra. It has been the mantra of the baby boomer generation and we have, as a culture, faithfully passed it on to our children, if not by intention then by example.

It is the root of our consumerism – a modern word for idolatry.

It is the engine of the current European economic crisis.

It is the great subverter of personal relationships and family life.

It is at the heart of our drift away from God.

We are the heirs who have wasted our inheritance.

To understand how shocking this is we need to put ourselves into the mind of Jesus hearers. This is a rural economy. The younger son will not be paid out of some trust fund being released early but only by the break up of the family estate, sold urgently and under unfavourable conditions. The cost to father and brother and mother will be considerable. The estate will take years to rebuild. It is utterly shocking and irresponsible behaviour. The listener will completely understand the elder brother's reluctance, later on, to forgive never mind rejoice.

Worse is to come for the younger son is not taking his share in order to invest it wisely and develop his own estate. Instead it will liberally, and I translate carefully, be emptied up against the wall on the traditional youthful investment of 'wine, women and song'.

The Greek words used are those of waste, throwing away, scattering. One of the words, ironically and deliberately, is the very opposite of 'saved'. He has taken everything that has been 'saved' for him and religiously and thoroughly 'unsaved' it.

The cost of his prodigality is ruin, starvation, slavery, degradation.

The companions of fortune have vanished. Poverty has no friends. From the power of privilege he descends to absolute dependence. The only task he can find is unclean, a swineherd, where the very swill looks now like a banquet to the wastrel son.

This is the story of the Fall of Man.

Everything that the Father has given us has been wasted in sin, riotous living, over indulgence.

At this point, at last aware of his true position, the younger son begins to reason. Jesus tells us that the young man 'came to himself'. He realised who he really was and who had been meant to be.

And I want you to notice, his reasoning is initially totally self interested. He recognises that he may not deserve to be called 'SON' again but even the servants on his father's estate have more than enough. So he will return, confess his sin, apologise and seek a lowly place as a servant in the estate of his wasted birthright.

Alienated by self indulgence. Mired in sin. Starved of sustenance and affection. Far, far from home and safety.

That is how the journey home of every son of Adam begins.

What neither the younger son, nor Jesus listeners, could have anticipated is what comes next. It is the revelation of the Father's heart.

While the Prodigal was still a long way off....The moment we turn God is already on His way to meet us.

The Father's heart was moved with compassion...He loves the returner
He ran to the boy.....His love is urgent, passionate.

He clasped him in His arms..... His love is comforting, reassuring, safe.

He kissed him tenderly.....the Father's relationship with His children is personal, intimate, all embracing.

The Father hears the son's confession, his expression of failure and sorrow.
But the Father already knows it and He knows what He will do.
The Estate will celebrate the restoration of the lost son.

There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than over ninety nine righteous (whoever they may be) who have no need of repentance.

This is the pattern of God's love for us. It is the pattern of His mercy.
We have but to turn homeward with sorrow for our sins and He is on His way to meet us, arms outstretched, heart overflowing with love.

This is the pattern every time a great sinner returns to the Faith.

It is the pattern every time we open the door of the confessional and kneel and say we are sorry for wasting or spoiling His gifts.

As we receive the absolution won for us by Christ on the Cross, the Father puts His arms around us and sends us in to the Feast of Feasts in the best robe of our Baptismal purity.

We would be happy to be servants. In His glorious almost prodigal love, He calls us sons and daughters.

On our returning Heaven rejoices.