

Lectio Divina: The Prodigal Son

I invite you to join me in some shared *lectio divina*, taking as our text one of the great parables of Jesus. The story is found in Luke 15 verses 11-32, and after each short section, I will offer some of the echoes that this text raises in my soul as I read it.

There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

Why does the son leave his home? Perhaps he is bored with the routine and feels he needs to 'take a break'. So he leaves his busy life at home and seeks out supposedly good times. But the promise of good times turns out an illusion.

Have I run away from God the Father?
Why do I run away?
Do I persuade myself that I'm having a good time away from Him?

Period for quiet reflection

Lord, help me not to run away from you and my life.

When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!

The son feels real hunger in his stomach but he feels more than hunger for food. He is lonely and nobody cares about him. He is desperate.

Have I ever felt real despair?
Where do I turn when I feel desperate?
Do I feel hungry and empty, even when I have plenty?

Period for quiet reflection

My God, my God why have you forsaken me?



I will get up 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 like one of your hired hands." So he set off and went to his father.

In the moment of weakness, he turns back to father. But this is also the moment of enlightenment because he believes his father will not reject him.

Am I capable of being this humble?
How can I learn this humility?
Where do I find such strong faith that God accepts me?

Period for quiet reflection

Lord, help me to come back to you.

But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

While he was still a long way off, the father forgave him. Such a small step by the son meets such strong love from the father. The father never stopped loving him but now he can show the love. What joy to picture God wanting to show his love if only I will turn to him.

Can I admit I am a sinner?
What is blocking that admission?
Do I rejoice in forgiveness?

Period for quiet reflection

Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.

Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is



yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”

The elder brother is a busy and serious man. Of course he is angry, but sadly, he is unable to step outside his own world and his own self-importance. What a missed opportunity.

Where is the elder son in me?
Am I too busy and self-important?
Do I feel jealous of others?
Why can't I just let go?

Period for quiet reflection

Lord, make me a channel of your peace

As a conclusion, say a familiar prayer such as 'Our Father'.

© Christopher Jamison 2006

First published in *Finding Sanctuary – Monastic Steps for Everyday Life*. Phoenix (2007)
Used in the BILC tool-box by permission of the author.

