

A Divine Sense of Extravagance

Twenty-fourth Week of Ordinary Time – September 11, 2016 – Luke 15: 1-32

Jerome Kodell, O.S.B., scripture scholar and theologian states in one of his biblical commentaries that the story of the prodigal son is *“probably the most famous of Jesus’ parables. Besides being a classic of spiritual insight, it is a literacy jewel. Through this story Jesus illustrates the earth-shattering acceptance available in the kingdom of God.”*

I was taken by Kodell’s notion of earth-shattering acceptance. What Kodell says is that *“the story is about a father and two sons, and its pivot is the father’s prodigality in love to both of his sons rather than the younger son’s wastefulness of worldly goods.”*

Prodigality is not a word that I’d use in my daily conversations. It does, however, strike me as appropriate to the lesson for this week. Prodigality means excessive or extravagant spending.

In the gospel this week, Jesus is attempting to explain that God lavishly and wastefully spends his love on us. Giving three different examples of this, Jesus asks the question, **“What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and, upon his arrival home, calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’** God continually searches for us no matter how lost we are, rejoicing when we make a return.

In the same spirit, Jesus tells of the woman who, having lost one of her ten coins searches until she finds it. **“And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.’”** The kingdom of God wants all to be accounted for. No one is lost to the God who continues to seek us in all ways.

This final story tells of two sons, one who is faithful and true but is filled with indignant righteousness, and the other son who rejects all that the father has to offer, squanders his inheritance and finally crawling back home hoping for a servant’s life. This is the pure example of lavish and extravagant love spent on those who do not deserve it. It is the pure example of mercy, given in Divine extravagance.

If I consider my own life, I realize how much God has lavished the Divine love and mercy upon me. I then must ask myself: How many times have I wasted the precious gifts and blessings bestowed on me in this life? How often have I been jealous of the gifts and blessings others have received, indignant that my righteous opinion or lifestyle is better than others?

This week we are called not only to accept this Divine extravagance but to also expend it on others. Can we seek to be as joyful at the return of one who is lost as God does? Or are we more focused on what we don’t have, how someone else got the better deal and how we will forever be bitter? Technically, we never hear in the story how the second son finally responds to his Father. I guess Jesus leaves us with a choice as to how we will respond to him.

Blessings!
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