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Daily Reflections

Journeying through Lent



Center for Spiritual Development

RETURN TO MY HEART

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Excerpts from Today's Gospel

Jesus told this parable: "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So, the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation....

When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need.... Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father.'...

So, he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him

His father ordered his servants, 'Quickly, bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' ...

Now the older son had been out in the field and on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf.'... He became angry

His father came out and pleaded with him. He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32

Reflection

The story of the Prodigal Son came about as Jesus was teaching the Pharisees and the scribes his reason for welcoming sinners and eating with them.

Because of the length of this familiar story, I have selected six moments with a brief comment on each one: death, loss and reflection, return, restoration, older brother, reconciliation.

Death: In Middle Eastern culture, if the younger son asks his father for his inheritance while his father is still alive, it is the same as to wish him dead. In this story, the younger son sells the property, leaves with the money and goes to a distant, perhaps Gentile, country. He no longer wishes to live under his father's roof and chooses to separate from his love.

Loss and Reflection: After the son has spent everything, a famine strikes the country, and he becomes homeless. He finds himself feeding pigs yet he himself is starving. In this desperate moment, the lost son comes to his senses, or "comes to himself." In his hunger, is he beginning to repent? In what ways might he be repenting? "I have shamed my father before our community.... I have rejected my father's love.... I only cared for myself."

Return: What was it like to make that long journey home? On the road to his father, he would have to pass by familiar communities who lived near the road and observed who is coming and going. As he walked along in his tattered clothes, emaciated from starving, weakened by his long journey, did he feel

shame? Would his father allow him to be a servant in the household? And then in the distance, he sees his father running toward him, something an elder would never do in his culture. His father embraces him, smothering him with kisses, weeping for joy.

Restoration: How long had his father been waiting for him on his front porch, staring as far as he could see down the road? Immediately: get the finest robe (the symbol of celebration, not work), a ring on his finger (a symbol of authority), and sandals for his feet (not -as a barefoot slave). His place as son is restored.

Older brother: The brother who had stayed home and continued to help his father all those years was shocked when he learned that his prodigal brother had returned, and celebrations had begun. Anger and envy arose in him, and he refused to go inside and join in the joyful dancing. Resentment held him captive and prevented him from welcoming his lost brother.

Reconciliation: His “prodigal father” left the happy gathering to go outside and to plead with his older son. *“You are with me always; everything I have is yours.”* I wonder, did he tell his son that he loved him? Did he embrace his hurting son? Did he find a way to unite his wounded family?



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For Pondering and Prayer

Take some time to notice what stands out for you in this reflection.

- Do you find yourself in the story?
 - Do you yearn to return to your loving God who is mother and father to you?
 - Do you hear the Beloved whispering to you: **Return to my heart**, my child. How I long to embrace you and honor you.
 - What do you want to express to your Beloved?
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