

Homily - Lk. 15: 1-3, 11-32
4th Sunday of Lent, Year C
26th/ 27th March 2022, Sooeey / Riverstown

In his book, *What's So Amazing About Grace*, Phillip Yancey tells the story of Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway grew up in a very devout evangelical family, yet he never experienced the grace of Christ there. He lived a libertine life that most of us would call “dissolute”. And there was no father, no parent waiting for him, and he sank into the mire of a graceless depression. In Ernest Hemingway’s short story “*Capital of the World*”, a Spanish Newspaper *El Liberal*, carried a poignant story about a father and his son. It went like this. A teen-aged boy, Paco, and his very wealthy father had a falling out, and the young man ran away from home. The father was crushed. After a few days, he realized that the boy was serious, so the father set out to find him. He searched high and low for five months to no avail. Finally, in a last, desperate attempt to find his son, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper. The ad read, “*Dear Paco, Meet me at the Hotel Montana on Tuesday. All is forgiven. I love you. Signed, Your Father.*” On Tuesday, in the office of Hotel Montana, over 800 Pacos showed up, looking for love and forgiveness from their fathers. — What a magnet that ad was! Over 800 Pacos!!

We all hunger for pardon. We are all “Pacos” yearning to run and find a father who will declare, “All is forgiven.”

We are on the Fourth Sunday of Lent that marks the midpoint in the Lenten preparation for Easter. Traditionally, it is called *Laetare Sunday* or Rejoice Sunday. It is a sign of what liturgical authors call “anticipatory joy”: a reminder that we are moving swiftly toward the end of our Lenten fast, and the joy of Easter is already on the horizon.

And the joy portrayed in the Gospel of today is, ‘that of a young son’s “coming home,” where he discovers and is healed by the reality of his father’s unconditional love’.

Now, acknowledging the allegation by the Scribes and Pharisees that He mingled with the sinners, Jesus outlines three aspects or dimensions of repentance, by presenting three characters in this parable: 1) the repentant younger son, 2) the forgiving father and 3) the self-justifying older son. And the lesson of Divine mercy to sinners is shown by the Father’s reception of the returned younger son, and a stern warning is given to the self-righteous people by presenting the dialogue between the father and his older son.

Well! There was an old mother who kept a candle burning at the window of her home every night for 10 years. One night, a poor wretched woman from the street knocked at her door. The aged woman welcomed her in and said to her: “Sit down by the fire”. Taking her seat, the stranger asked the old woman: “Why do you keep that light in the window?”.

The old woman paused a while and then gently replied: “The light! That is to light the path for my wayward daughter when she returns. I have kept that light on, ever since she ran away from home ten years ago. Since then, my hair has turned grey. Folks often blame me for worrying about her. But you see, I am her mother, and sometimes half a dozen times in the night I open the door and stare into the darkness, and cry: Elizabeth, Elizabeth!”. And she continued: Well! I must not tell you any more of my troubles, for I guess from the way you are weeping, you have enough of your own”. But then, as she looked more closely and intently at the stranger in the semi-darkness of the room, she cried: “Why – Can it be true? Yes! You’re Elizabeth, my own lost child! You’re home again!” And there was much repentance and rejoicing in that home that night.

Now, this is what is exactly happening in the parable we heard today from the Gospel of Luke. Here, the prodigal son began by wanting freedom from his father. Hence,

he forced his father to give him his right to the father's property. He then takes his Dad's money, and leaves home. But then sadly enough, the young man's life spins out of control and he ends up in the worst possible place feeding swine. And finally, Jesus says: "He comes to his senses and decides to return home and beg forgiveness".

Meanwhile back home, His father is actively scanning the horizon longing for his missing child to come home. And once the father learns that his son is coming back, what does he do at that moment according to Jesus? He runs. Yes! The Dad runs out to greet his son filled with compassion and mercy even before the son could start to blurt out any word of apology.

The Gospel pictures the father as a runner. Yes! What the son did was wrong. But this father knew what every parent knows. It is possible to love a child that's not perfect. This father knew what every spouse knows. It is possible to love someone who is capable of hurting you. So, this father does not sit back passably saying to himself: Well! That son of mine knows where to find me and he can come back and beg forgiveness if he wants it. No. when his son according to Jesus is still very far off, he runs to welcome him home. There is no waiting, there is no withholding, and there is no refusing forgiveness. There is the joyful rush to run out there and shower his son with mercy.

The father in the story represents God the Father who is extravagant and generous with His forgiveness and mercy. And it is actually the story of how God forgives and heals the repentant sinner. But many of us have a hard time believing it. Can we fully grasp this image of God given by Jesus? Can we fully comprehend, that God is constantly scanning the horizon for any sign for the return of His children? Can we begin to believe, that the God of the Universe is a runner?

Well! Today Jesus gives us the image of a God who is ready and able to run to each of his children with His message of mercy. And the question Jesus asks each of us today is this: Will you accept the Father's forgiveness and partake of the banquet, or will you remain outside? St. Paul would remind us here: "We implore you, in Christ's name: be reconciled to God." And when we do that, we will be able to hear God's voice in the depths of our hearts whispering to us: "All I have is yours". Let's then tune our ears, our minds and our hearts to His gentle whisper.

God bless you all, **Amen**