

Translation from the Book

Ὁ Θεός στην Καινή Διαθήκη, Βοήθημα Κατωτέρου Κατηχητικοῦ Β', έκδ.
«Χριστιανική Ἐλπίς» Ὁρθόδοξη Ἀδελφότητα, Θεσσαλονίκη 2015, σσ. 113-118

The Parable of the Prodigal Son / of the Compassionate Father **Lk 15:11-32**

Observe these two pictures (show the orthodox icon of this parable). What could be the relationship between these two young men? They look alike; however, they are so different! The first seems dirty and ragged, whereas the second one seems like a rich, well-dressed nobleman. Could it be the same person? Listen to this story.

There once lived a lord with a very large fortune, many estates and servants. He had two sons. One day, the younger son said to his father with a demand: "Father, give me the share of the estate that will belong to me. I want you to give me the money of my heritage!".

The father was surprised. There was no reason to distribute his fortune like that all of a sudden. However, he gave in to his son's request. He respected his son's freedom and gave him the share of the estate that belonged to him according to the Law.

The young man couldn't wait any longer to leave his father's house. He quickly gathered all his possessions and slammed the door of the house behind him. "Finally! I am free! Free!" he shouted happily. That's what he believed, the poor guy.

So, he left his home. And where did he go? To a faraway foreign land. He had a lot of money. And he spent it recklessly here and there. Day and night, he was having a feast, eating and drinking, indulging in sin. In short, he was living a wasteful and sinful life. He also made many friends but these "friends" would stick with him as long as he had the money.

But one day, the time came that his money ran out. After all this extravagance and recklessness, poverty struck. And as if that wasn't enough, suddenly a great famine came upon the land. How could the prodigal son guess, in the middle of his spree and waste, that such a time might come? So, he began to be in need. He lived in great misery and poverty. He had once dreamed of living a carefree and luxurious life but now he was utterly poor!... And not just poor, but alone! His "friends" abandoned him because they saw he no longer had any money. Unhappy and disappointed, he started wandering around, seeking help and looking for work to survive.

Finally, he found someone who, after much pleading, agreed to hire him. However, he treated him with great contempt, sending him to feed the pigs, a humiliating job for a Jew since pork was forbidden meat. The pigs he was taking care were in a better condition than he was! They were well-fed and even the carob pods, those long fruits that the animals liked, were plenty for them. But the prodigal son was given very little food that wasn't enough. He was starving, really starving... If only he could sneak a carob pod from the

pigs... But he wasn't allowed to, as the animals would be deprived! So, he couldn't even eat from the pigs' food! What a great downfall for a young nobleman!

As he sat there, miserable and longing for the carob pods the pigs were eating, he thought to himself: "Even the servants in my father's house have plenty of food, while I am starving...".

He reflected on his current situation. Then, as if a light had suddenly switched on in his mind, he realized the truth. It was as if the pigs' food brought him to his senses! Can you believe it, even the pigs were better off than him! He remembered everything he had left behind: his life in his father's wealthy house, all his possessions and the most precious of all, his father's love and care...

At that moment, he made a heroic decision: "I will get up and go back to my father!".

The prodigal son truly repented. He didn't waste a moment. He got up immediately and started his journey back. He was not going back with his head held high though, as when he left, but in humility because he was in fault. He had only one desire: to ask his compassionate father for forgiveness, the father who he had hurt so deeply. "Father, I have sinned! I have sinned against God and against you! I am not worthy to be called your son! Take me as your hired servant!", that's what he planned to say.

But let's now turn to the father. What did he do all this time? Was he angry with his prodigal son, holding a grudge? No, he was searching for him! Every day, for hours, he stood at the end of the road, staring in the hope that he might see his child! The hope of his son's return never faded from his fatherly heart!

One day, as the father stood gazing down that road, the very road his son took when he turned his back and fled far away, he couldn't believe in his eyes... Someone was approaching. It was a poor, dirty, ragged figure, dragging his feet from exhaustion... But he looked like his son! Could it be him? Yes, the father was not mistaken; it was him!

It was his child returning! He recognized him! His heart was touched with compassion for his son's current state. He couldn't wait any longer and rushed out to the road himself. He forgot all about his old age and ran... He ran to embrace his prodigal son who was returning.

"Father!" he heard his son's voice between his sobs, "I have sinned, forgive me! I am not worthy to be called your son!".

The father embraced him and filled him with kisses. He didn't scold him; he didn't punish him. He only showed him love, reassured him that he had forgiven him and welcomed him back into his home.

"Quickly! Bring the finest clothes and dress my son! Put the family ring back on his finger! Put shoes on his feet! And let's prepare the fatted calf we've been saving for special occasions! Set a festive table! Today is a great day! My son was lost and is found! He was dead and is alive again!".

"Repentance - Confession"

This wonderful story is one of our Christ's parables: the parable of the prodigal son, or alternatively, the parable of the compassionate father.

I would like you to look again at the pictures I showed you at the beginning. What eventually led the young man to his downfall? In one word, it was "sin". (We turn the image so that the children can see the word written on its backside). And what turned the prodigal son back into a nobleman? In one word, it was "repentance!". (We turn to the second image, so the children can see the corresponding word written on its back).

But do you know who hides behind this nobleman? Each of us. Yes, every time we sin, we resemble the prodigal son because sin distances us from our heavenly Father and dirties our souls. Truly, many times we would prefer not to have done some things, because we have not only grieved God but also spoiled our souls. Like when curiosity gets the best of us and we sit in front of the television or computer screen watching indecent images... Or when we engage in inappropriate conversations with our friends... Or perhaps we've made disgraceful gestures...

God, who loves us - let us know this - always has His arms wide open for us, just like the father in the parable. And when we genuinely repent, He accepts us back into His divine embrace.

His love is so great that He forgives everything and always waits for us. Where does He wait for us? He waits for us in the Sacrament of Confession. He waits for us to confess our sins before the priest, who represents Him and seek forgiveness. And then the Holy Spirit comes and wipes all our sins out! All the dirtiness of sin disappears, the burden on our souls is lifted! We experience the joy that the prodigal son felt when his father forgave him and embraced him lovingly.

And just as the prodigal son immediately changed his clothes and put on splendid clothes like a prince so too, after Confession, we have white and clean souls. We go to Confession with dirty souls and leave with them spotlessly clean! It's a radical change, a wonderful transformation!

So, take some time to think about your actions that grieved God and dirtied your souls. And next time, you'll be ready to confess them to the priest. How touching it will be to experience the moment after our confession! Our souls, dressed in white and light, will praise God, who has the power to change and make all His children beautiful!

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