

4 Lent C SML 2019
LK 15:1-3,11-32

Experiences of God are all around us, and some careful reflection on those experiences can add up to a set of convincing arguments that there is a God. More than a few on the way into Mass this morning commented how beautiful the daffodils are. And I said, "God does good work!" However, these experiences may or may not tell us much about who God is or what God's attributes might be. For that knowledge, the Catholic Church has always relied on revelation, God revealing Himself to us, and He reveals Himself to us in two way: Church teaching and Sacred Scripture. And since it is the Catholic Church who decided there would be 73 books in the Bible, the Bible is part of Church teaching.

Scripture tells us who God is in history, through His relationship with His chosen people Israel, as recorded in the Old Testament, and through his Son, Jesus, who reveals God's attributes in:

- ✓ His person,
- ✓ His teaching

- ✓ and His actions,

as recorded in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, from:

- ✓ the rebellion at Mount Sinai
- ✓ to the settlement of the land of Israel,
- ✓ to the trials,
- ✓ exile
- ✓ and return of the Jewish people,

God constantly made Himself known. In the midst of His people's inconstancy and infidelity, God made Himself known by His constancy and His fidelity.

The Old Testament emphasizes the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is a just God. But the Old Testament also reveals that His mercy is greater than His justice, greater in the sense that mercy is primary and fundamental. A collect in the Roman Missal says it best: God in Whom justice and mercy meet.

God's faithful, unbounded mercy continues in the teaching of Our Blessed Lord, most poignantly and powerfully in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, or more aptly called the Parable of the Merciful Father, where the

prodigal son is a universal figure, an Everyman (a “you and I” kind of guy):

- ✓ feeling the full weight of the human condition,
- ✓ “the awareness of squandered sonship,”
- ✓ our lost human dignity.

By restoring his repentant son to his house, not (as the son proposes) as a hired worker, but as a member of the family, the forgiving father is faithful to his paternity, restoring his wayward son to the dignity of being a son, who was lost. God does not humiliate. God liberates.

Here’s a question. In this incredible parable of the prodigal son, when do you think the father loved his son the most? Almost always, the first answer that comes to mind is the moment where the father met the son on the road.

After a bit more thought, some suggest it might be when the father gave him his inheritance and let him go. That is when it becomes clear: there is no point in the story where the father loves his son more than any other point in the story. He loved him unconditionally through

every turn of event. His unconditional love is the only constant in the story.

The events in this story cannot be accounted for by the varying love of the father – only the varying perception of it by the son. Though he was not less loved at any point in the story, through most of it he lived as if he were. He lived as if he were less loved.

- ✓ When he took the money from his father and stormed off the farm, grateful to be out from under his clutches and free to pursue his own way, he lived less loved.
- ✓ When he spent this money in a foreign land, wasting it on his own pleasures and thinking he'd finally fooled his father, he lived less loved.
- ✓ When he was in dire straits, and longed for the husks, he lived less loved.
- ✓ When he started for home, practicing his plea of repentance, willing to be a hireling, he lived less loved.

But finally, when he was home in the robe, the sandals, and the ring, sitting at his father's table, sinking his teeth into the filet mignon, it finally sank in. He was

loved. But he always was loved, unconditionally! It was just then, sitting at the table, that he could stop living as if he weren't.

Most of our lives are spent living less loved.

- ✓ When we worry that God will ask us for some horrible sacrifice, we live less loved.
- ✓ When we indulge ourselves in sin, we live less loved.
- ✓ When we give in to anxiety in the crush of circumstance, we live less loved.
- ✓ When we try to earn God's favor by our own efforts, we live less loved.

Our Blessed Lord ended the story at an interesting point. The younger son was in the house enjoying his newfound relationship with his father. The older son was still outside weighing his options. Would he come to know just how much he was loved and join the celebration, or would he remain convinced of his father's unfairness and stay angry and alone outside?

The choice was his and the choice is ours. Everything about our life hinges on the answer to one simple question. Do you know how loved you really are?

What kind of father was this? The kind of father who does not want us to live less loved.