

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Fourth Sunday in Lent

By: Fr. Bob

In our Gospel today the Pharisees see Jesus cavorting with sinners. Why in heaven's name would he choose to spend his time and energy—to fill his days with these kind of people—the people who didn't believe, who didn't do things right, who disregarded the law—why associate with them? What worth did they have?

And Jesus' response is three parables: the story of the lost sheep, the story of the lost coin and today's Gospel reading about the lost son. And the obvious and simple message to the Pharisees would be that if there is a chance that one of these people that he spent time with might come back, might be healed, might realize the power of God in their lives—then that's where the energy needs to be spent.

But of course the story has even more to say. We might concentrate on the son who with all sorts of arrogance demands what he believes he is entitled to and goes and takes care of his needs and ignores any responsibility he has to his family and their farm and their feelings. And then in a wake-up moment he realizes how foolish he has been and decides to swallow his pride and go back home—ready to hear “I told you so.”

Or we could concentrate on the father who is so anxious to have his son return that he doesn't say “I told you so”. He seems as a matter of fact expect him home—he runs to greet him and hardly gives him the chance to say “I'm sorry.” The son's return is more important for the father than the fact that he left.

Or of course we could look at the older brother—the good one—the perfect son. He has stayed close to his family and done what is right. He has never left and so he didn't need to return. He probably figures as the Pharisees do in their questioning of Jesus, that the family has done fine without the younger son all these years. Why make such a fuss on his return? Do we really need him?

And maybe it is this son—the older one—the Jesus wants us to focus on. He does mention him and his story isn't finished. Did he go in to the party? Did he ever accept his brother's return? Jesus keeps us hanging.

The fact is that the only person in the story who is not happy at the end is this older brother who can't let go. What his brother did in the past—what he himself has done in the past—how good and faithful he was—is what stops him from going on to tomorrow. It keeps him from the banquet.

Jesus' ministry is about rejoicing in God's love—God's way of doing things—God's plan. The Pharisees had their plan. The older son in the story had his plan. And usually we have our own plans. And we get stuck.

The first reading today is about a people who traveled from slavery to freedom—gradually. They kept trying to do it their way and not until they let God be God did they get into Caanan. The reading is a celebration that finally they have arrived—but it was hard work.

It would be hard work for the older brother to get into the celebration. It would mean putting aside his judgments and anger and sense of entitlement. It would mean focusing on the sheep who had returned, the coin that had been found, the brother who was once again where he should be. Not easy to work—and it is in many ways contrary to what our ego tells us to do.

In the display in the foyer which commemorates Archbishop Oscar Romero there is a quote from the Bishop that perhaps can help us if we're to try to suspend judgment—try to reconcile—try to welcome the lost back.

Archbishop Romero says that the kingdom—the perfect place and perfect way—is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond our vision. God's way—God's perfect forgiveness and all-inclusive love is something we can hardly imagine. Romero says “nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.” Perfectly forgiving the other—as God does—is beyond us. We can't do it

Romero says, however, that

“there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest. . . We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.”

And so we'll actively try to move beyond the older brother's stance and try to embrace the opportunities to forgive, to suspend judgment like the father in the story did.

We won't do it perfectly—we know it. But we'll get closer to the party, the banquet, the kingdom that way.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Joshua 5:9-12

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Luke 15:11-32

March 10, 2013

靈 修 生 活

罪 之 寬 赦

張 春 申 神 父

浪子回頭的比喻是我們百聽不厭的，但是普通而論，往往關於這個比喻的解釋，會偏重浪子的犯罪。其實為路加而論，他却要人更注意比喻中的父親。路加在他寫的福音第十五章中，連載着三個比喻：第一個是牧人尋獲亡羊；第二個是婦女找得遺失的錢幣；第三個就是浪子回頭。按照比喻的上下文看來，稱第三個比喻為「浪子回頭」，還不如「慈父愛子」更加適合。因為這個比喻，實在關於天主怎樣拯救了有罪的人類。

保祿宗徒在哥羅森書信中有一段話，很能幫助我們了解耶穌的比喻：「現今天主卻以祂(耶穌)血肉的身體，籍著死亡使你們與自己和好了，把你們呈獻在祂跟前，成為聖潔，無瑕和無可指摘的。」救援工程是天父籍著基督與罪人和好，這正是我們聽到的比喻的意義。

墮落犯罪的人類，可說是與天主敵對。正如福音中的浪子，要求應得的一份家產，與父親分離。這也是今天大家經驗得到的，往往愈是沉溺在貪慾、自私、罪惡中的人，愈是害怕聽到真理、純潔、犧牲；這是與天主為敵的現象。而且凡是沒有天主經驗的罪人，很難同人類真實地交往，毫無隔閡地投己，如同浪子窮困時候，與他一起耗盡財產的人，都不知到那裡去了；留下他一人孤苦無依。為此，犯罪不只與天主隔絕，同時也與人分離。最後，罪人在天主所創造的天地萬物中，也不得安寧。這點在浪子身上，也有些縱跡；無論如何，他是身處在一個大荒年時代，豬吃的豆莢為他也是不可多得，好像世上的東西，已經不再和諧地為他服役應用了。至於一個與天人分離的罪人，往往已不能欣賞到美艷、秀麗的宇宙萬物，反而處處發覺不如意的環境而加以詛咒。

明白這些之後，便可知道人類的墮落，可說是一個為敵的境界：與天主、與人、與萬物失掉和諧。為此保祿稱基督的救援是修好或者和好。不過，應當注意的是，天主領先與有罪的人類和好。這在我們今天的比喻中非常清楚地描寫了出來。福音說：「他離得還遠的時候，他父親就看見了他，動了憐憫的心，跑上前去，撲在他的脖子上，熱情地親吻他。」事實上，是天父先遣發基督來向人類報告與完成和好的喜訊。

耶穌公開宣講時，不斷提到天主與人和好的喜訊，今天的比喻便是一個明證；最後十字架上肯定了這個喜訊；當人經驗到天父籍著基督所賜的和好而自己又與天主和好時，他才可以經驗天主子女間的連繫而與他們和好。這時，天地萬物在他眼前，都是來自天父的禮物，成為他得其所哉的神聖環境；正如浪子重新回到父親家中所有的快樂。

今天這隻我們稱為「慈父愛子」的比喻，幫助我們發覺基督救援的和好幅度。由於我們身處一個救恩尚未完全為人接受的世界，因此不斷見到國家與國家、民族與民族、人與人之間的仇恨為敵。

我們也見到人間的環境，由於人類的貪慾未斷，受到破壞與污染，有時使人無法生存下去。這一切的根源，還是人類抗拒天主，在罪惡中與祂敵對。這須要我們自己在四旬期中，聯同教會，作為和好的標記；促使人類接受與天主的和好。

摘自「妙音送長風」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 三 年 三 月 十 日

蘇 5:9-12 ; 格後 5:17-21 ; 路 15:11-32