

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Mar 22nd 2014

Today's responsorial that "The Lord is kind and merciful" can seem a bit trite. We know, we know: we've heard these and similar phrases so many times that we can become numb to their significance.

Luke's Gospel of the Prodigal Son, however, reminds us of two powerful truths: how joyous we should be to have a kind and merciful God and how difficult it is for us humans to be kind and merciful to one another.

When arrogance, selfishness, and weakness carry me toward a life of spiritual dissipation, God waits patiently for my return so that he can forgive me, so that he can put my iniquities far behind me. Wrath does not consume him, nor is he fixated on revenge. Wow! How different that is from the world we humans inhabit...

I am no stranger to egotism and selfishness. I relish the chance to say "I told you so" (even if it's to myself) when I know I'm right. I'm still holding a few grudges. I'm not afraid to assign blame.

The three perspectives of the Prodigal Son parable show us how difficult – and profound – this whole "kind and merciful" thing really is. We might try to figure out which figure represents "me" in the story, but all of the angles offer a chance for reflection.

The younger son: When selfishness leads, as it always does, to emptiness and misery, do I surrender to God? Do I have the humility to admit fault and return home? Am I open to the mercy and kindness others may show me?

The elder son: Do I feel entitled because I do things "the right way?" Do I think my work ethic and good fortune in life give me priority over those who cannot conquer their own challenges?

The father: When others abandon me or thoughtlessly squander what I offer, do I embrace them when they return? When people self-destruct, lose their way, or succumb to weakness, am I there with a kind hand to hoist them back up? Is my heart open to forgiving those who need mercy?

Let us pray for the generous heart of the father, the humility of the younger brother, and the work ethic of the elder brother. Let us try, like the Lord, to be kind and merciful.

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