

## **Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Mar 6th 2016**

### The Tenderness of Mercy

Jesus' narration of the story of "a man with two sons," which we know as the story of the Prodigal Son, never loses its power to move us deeply, no matter how often it is repeated. Its appeal seems especially strong in this Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Among the many images and lines of text in the story, the scene of the meeting of the father and his repentant son draws us in a particular way. There the text reads: "He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him." This poignant scene has been captured numerous times in great works of art, perhaps most notably in the quietly dramatic rendition by Caravaggio. Both text and image remain far from suggesting a mere "distant forgiveness" or even a simple "reconciliation." The weary son receives more than he could have imagined from his father who has waited patiently for this moment. Not waiting for any words from the son, and already knowing the sorrow that was in the young man's heart, the father reaches out with a deeply tender embrace.

Pope Francis, who often narrates his own powerful experience of going to confession as a young man, knows the power of the Father's mercy and desires that the whole world come to know it. Some years before his election, in words that say much about this personal knowledge, then-Cardinal Bergoglio went so far as to say: "Only someone who has encountered mercy, who has been caressed by the tenderness of mercy, is happy and comfortable with the Lord . . . I dare to say that the privileged locus of the encounter [with God] is the caress of the mercy of Jesus Christ on my sin."

The "tenderness of mercy," the "caress of the mercy of Jesus Christ on my sin." The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ desires that we know and experience that. Where do I need that tenderness, that caress? The call of the gospel is to permit ourselves to be there, to rest there and to ask that we might receive this great grace.

Reverend Richard Gabuzda-Creighton University's Institute for Priestly Formation