

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Mar 2nd 2013

The story of the prodigal son. This may be a familiar story to many. The favored son sins against his father and then leaves. The dutiful son stays behind. When the prodigal son returns, his father welcomes him back, no questions asked. The other son questions his father's actions, which are selfless and unconditional. It is a timeless tale that resonates.

The act of contrition is one that our society is not familiar with nowadays. For example, when we get into a car accident, our insurance companies tell us not to apologize because that may imply we are at fault and may have legal complications. People may bump into you while walking on a bustling sidewalk and we are now shocked when someone actually utters an "excuse me". Students do not readily ask forgiveness when they wrong each other. Universities now have degrees in conflict resolution and offices of student conduct to help restore justice when others are harmed.

And I have to say that I understand why that evolution has occurred. After twelve years of Catholic school, I have a deep appreciation of God's abundant love for me. But asking forgiveness and making the time to reflect on my shortcomings-when I choose to distance myself from God, has not come as natural. It's at times disconcerting, awkward and uncomfortable.

Growing up, I remember going to reconciliation services at Church. Rarely were one on one reconciliations with a priest incorporated into my schooling. In fact, I distinctly remember one service where we were given a piece of paper to write down our sins and then place them on a lit Weber grill on the altar as a symbol of our community absolution. As a kid, I thought that was a neat thing...no one on one interaction with the priest...just the secret note offered up...easy.

Before this past Christmas, I made it a point to go to reconciliation service at my parish. And sure enough, when the meditative music came on for the individual time with a priest, I felt my anxiety rise. My heart beat quickened. My palms grew a little damp. There was no group grilling of sins this evening.

And then I found myself praying for an inner peace to come forward into this sacrament of not only reconciliation but of profound and limitless love. Despite my years, experience, education and rational thought, I had to talk myself into accepting the grace that was so freely being offered to me without restriction. While by no means a prodigal daughter, I found myself on that cold winter's night truly coming to terms as an adult with the psalm, the lord is kind and merciful.

In this season of Lent, I encourage you to make time to ask for that abundant love and forgiveness that God offers us. Whether that be during confession, a group reconciliation service where sins are burned or in your home, I challenge us all to reflect on what brings us closer to God and what prevents us from seeking communion with him/her. The mercy and grace are waiting. We just need to take that leap of faith and come home.

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