

## HOMILY 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY LENT March 30, 2025

The Gospel reading today is a familiar parable, we refer to it as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but it could just as easily be called the Parable of the Forgiving Father or the Parable of the Unforgiving Son. We can learn a lot from all three of the characters in this parable. But let's start with the Prodigal. He was asking his father for his inheritance before his father died. He was really disrespecting his father. He was essentially telling his father that he was tired of waiting for him to die and he just wanted his inheritance now. We would never do such a thing, but let me update it a little. When I was practicing law, I received quite a few calls from children that wanted to hide their parent's money so that Medicaid would pay for the nursing home. They would say "They are spending my inheritance." Well, first of all that is Medicaid fraud and likely to be caught, and secondly they are not spending your inheritance. They are spending the money that they probably worked very hard to get and to save, so I think they should spend all of it in whatever way they would like. The prodigal took the money and spent all of it on a life of dissipation. He was doing things that he knew were not good for him, and now he must pay the consequences. How awful. We would never do that. Really? We all do some things that are not particularly good for us and sometimes we must pay the consequences. There was a man that went to his doctor for his yearly physical. At the conclusion, he asked the doctor, do you think I will live into my 90's? The doctor asked him, do you exercise regularly? Yes, every day. Do you watch your diet? Yes. No red meat, no desserts, no sugary drinks. Do you smoke? No, I never have. Do you drink alcohol? Never, in fact, I quit going to social events because there was always alcohol there and I do not like it. The doctor looked at him and said why do you want to live into your 90's? What do we learn here? I am not encouraging you to do things that are not good for you, and maybe Lent is a good time to look at our bad habits and change one or two. But maybe we judge the prodigal too harshly. Maybe we need to judge less and love more. Maybe we need to stop blaming people when they cause some of the negative consequences they are dealing with and be more supportive.

And what about the Parable of the Forgiving Father. He gave his son what he asked for and loved him. He let him do what he had already decided to do. He had already forgiven his son and he was just waiting for him to return as he saw him when he was still a long way off. He forgave his son before his son apologized. Do you think a lecture would have helped at this point? His son had already hit bottom. He did not need a lecture and if

he had given him a lecture before he left, it would have just been more difficult for him to return. Most of the parents here do not have to deal with this type of situation with their adult children, but I think many parents are very troubled because their children do not come to church. That was not the way you raised them. Do you think a lecture would help? You have to let your adult children make their decisions. Now you can pray for them. You can tell them why you come to church. You can extend an invitation to attend something at church they might be interested in. You can even tell them you would like them to come to church with you on Easter. But lectures do not help and your first job as a parent is always to love your children.

And what about the Parable of the Unforgiving Son? I think he wants to see his brother punished, but hasn't he been punished enough? He has hit bottom and he is penniless. His work has just begun. He now has to win back the trust of his family and his community. How hard to you think it was for him to come back home in disgrace? What else could you do to him? And the older son wants to be thanked for taking care of his father's property. Actually, he was taking care of his own property. Everything his father has is his. The better he takes care of the property the more he will inherit. Do you think he was doing it out of love for his father? If he loved his father, he would have joined the party when his father pleaded with him to do so. And what is he going to gain if he does not forgive. He will have a strained relationship with his father, he would lose his relationship with his brother, and he is isolating himself from the community. They are all having a good time at the party and he is alone. And if this continues he may even cause a division in the family and with family friends. Are you going to side with me or my brother? That happens in families. He could just end up alone. I do not see how failure to forgive would benefit him. I think it will only hurt him. I think some of us have given up close friends and family members for far less. Sometimes we just need to forgive and move on. Sometimes we just need to accept people for what they are. If you have had a close relationship with someone for more than a couple of years there will be things that you do not like about them. No one is perfect. You can sometimes try to work out your differences, but sometimes you just have to let it go, accept them for what they are and love them. If you cannot do that, you will end up losing the relationship or turning the close relationship into an acquaintance.

We need close relationships to have a successful life that is meaningful and has purpose. I do not want to let go of any of my relationships. How about you?