



A SEASON OF RETURN

As we enter the sacred season of Lent, the Church gently calls us to a deeper awareness of who we are, where we are going, and—above all—whose we are. Lent is not merely a season of sacrifice, but a season of return: a journey back to the heart of God, an invitation to walk once more toward the open arms of our Heavenly Father and to rediscover the faithful love that has been waiting for us all along. More than a moral lesson on repentance, it is a revelation of the Father’s heart. As we reflect on it during Lent, we begin to see our own story woven into its sacred narrative, hearing anew the call to return home and to experience the mercy of God afresh.

1. The Younger Son: The Illusion of Freedom

The parable opens with a startling request from the younger son: “Father, give me my share of the inheritance now.” It is a demand made too soon, revealing impatience, entitlement, and a desire to break away from the security of his father’s home in search of independence. What follows is equally

“I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.’”

LUKE 15:17 -18

(The Turning Point of the Prodigal Son)



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striking. Though the father has every right to refuse, he offers with no argument and no rebuke. He grants the inheritance and allows his son to leave, not because he approves of the decision, but because love does not force itself.

The son travels to a distant land and quickly wastes everything in reckless living. What once appeared to be freedom soon shows its true face.

He is left feeling needy, isolated, and hungry, reduced to feeding pigs, a detail that would have signaled complete humiliation to any audience. His outward poverty reflects an even deeper inner emptiness. The freedom he sought has become a form of bondage.

The father's response, or rather, his silence, is deeply revealing. He does not pursue his son, restrain him, or attempt to control his choices. This silence is not indifferent, nor is it approval. It is the quiet strength of love that respects freedom, even when that freedom leads to suffering. The father lets his son go, yet his love does not diminish him. His heart remains turned toward the one who has left, patiently, watchfully, and ready for the day of return.

Here, the parable touches our own lives. How often do we seek fulfillment outside the Father's house, chasing pleasure, independence, or easy answers, only to discover a deeper hunger within? Lent begins precisely at this moment: with the honest recognition of our wandering and the courage to name our emptiness. Sin promises freedom, but it often delivers isolation. Like the younger son, we may desire the gifts while forgetting the Giver, until we realize that true freedom is found not in leaving the Father, but in remaining with Him.

2. The Moment of Awakening: “He Came to Himself.”

One of the most powerful lines in the parable is simple yet profound: “He came to himself.” This is the turning point of the story.

At the lowest moments, surrounded by hunger and loneliness, the son remembers his father. He recalls that even the hired servants in his father's house live better than he does now. More than regret, this moment is one of remembrance. He rediscovers not only his father's goodness, but his own true identity.

This is repentance in its deepest form, not shame-driven remorse, but a return to truth. The son gets up and goes home, confessing his sin without excuses. True repentance is not rooted in fear of

punishment, but in trust in the Father's mercy.

Lent is our moment of awakening. It invites us to “come to ourselves” in God's presence to remember that we were created for communion, not for spiritual famine. Repentance is not a defeat nor is it rooted in shame; it is a homecoming to the Father's embrace.

3. The Father Who Sees, Seeks, and Runs

Perhaps the most shocking moment in the parable is not the son's rebellion, but the father's response. While the son is still far off, the father sees him, filled with compassion, he runs to meet him, embraces him, and kisses him.

In the cultural context of the time, a patriarch running would have been considered undignified. Yet love makes the father forget dignity. Mercy breaks all conventions. Before, the son can finish his rehearsed confession, the father restores him, fully clothed him with the finest robe, placed a ring on his finger, and welcomed him into a feast. These are not symbols of tolerance, but of restored sonship with the father.

This is the heart of God. He does not wait for us to be worthy. He runs toward us while we are still far off. This parable prepares our hearts to understand the mission of Christ Himself. The mercy revealed here reaches its fullness in the Paschal Mystery. At Calvary, the Father does not merely run to meet us; He gives us His only beloved Son.

No sin is too great, no distance too far, and no shame too deep for the mercy to overcome. The prodigal son expected rejection, but he encountered restoration.

This Lent, let us have the courage to come home. Let us allow ourselves to be embraced, healed, and transformed. For when we return, we discover that mercy has been waiting for us all along.

4. The Elder Brother: The Hidden Distance

The parable does not end with the feast. It ends with a question. The elder son, who remained at home

and worked faithfully, hears of the celebration and refuses to enter. He is angry, wounded, and resentful. Though physically close, his heart is far from the father. His resentment replaces joy, mercy offends him, and grace feels unfair.

Once again, the father goes out, this time to the faithful son. He reassures him gently: “You are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.” The father’s love reaches both sons, the one broken by rebellion and the one hardened by self-righteousness.

Lent too challenges us here. Do we struggle with God’s generosity toward others? Do we measure love by merit rather than mercy? The elder son warns us of a faith that obeys outwardly but resists grace inwardly.

From Exile to the Father’s Embrace

Ultimately, the parable of the Prodigal Son is not a story of failure, but of hope. Its true climax is the embrace. This is the heart of the Gospel and the heart of Lent. Lent is not about proving ourselves to God but allowing ourselves to be loved by Him. It is a season of grace, a time to be clothed once again in mercy and restored to our identity as beloved sons and daughters waiting to be welcomed from exile to embrace.

“For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” - Luke 15:24 ■