



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend's Gospel is one of the most well-known parables of Jesus, most often called the Parable of the Prodigal Son. While less well-known, it is also called the Parable of the Forgiving Father. This is obvious from the first part of the story – how the father receives the wayward son with open-arms. The father not only welcomes him back, he completely reinstates him as his son.

Much is also made of the older son who refuses to come into the house once he discovers the reason for the party – the return of the “ingrate.” Like so many of us, we resent the one who has torn our lives apart, and we struggle with forgiveness. This is a good reminder that should we refuse to forgive, we cannot enter the Father's house (heaven), not because God refuses us entrance, but because, like the older son, we choose not to enter, “if that person is in there!”

When we look at the mentality of the older son, however, we can discover more about the rebellion of the younger son. When the father comes out to bring the older son into the house (the same action he took when the younger son returned – he *humbles* himself to go after his sons, not to wait for them to come to him), the son says,

All these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf. (Luke 15:29-30)

Why has the older son been good and obedient? Not because he loved his father, and not because he understood his father's love. Only because he expected to be rewarded. He sees his father as a task-master. He sees himself as a servant, not as a son. He expects payment. Think about how the younger son, on his way home, prepares his apology by saying, “treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers” (Luke 15:19). He doesn't expect sonship. He doesn't understand the love of a father. He only expects payment for his work. Where did he get this mentality? From watching his older brother. He saw his brother act like a servant not a son, and he wanted nothing to do with it. He wanted *out*, NOW! The older brother was more patient, it is true, but wanted the same thing.

The father's reaction shows that *both sons got it wrong!* Neither understood the love of the father, and how everything he has belongs to them. He is not looking for servants but sons!

And we're in the same boat. Too often, we see our relationship with God as servant-master. Yes, we call God “Father.” We've gotten used to being called sons and daughters of God. We don't understand sonship, though. We go around thinking about God as someone we have to “get on His good-side,” to make sure He gives us what we want, and eventually lets us into heaven. In the meantime, we do things we know we're not supposed to do, but justify it by saying, “It's not *that* bad,” or pretending God can't see it. That mentality is totally that of seeing God as “the enforcer” and not as FATHER.

But God IS Father. From all eternity, He is Father. All fatherhood comes from Him. What do we need to change in our thoughts and actions to show that we really understand His love as Father? What do we need to accept to understand He really loves us?