

## 5th Sunday of Lent — April 7, 2019

I should like to go back to last Sunday's parable as a way of setting the stage for today's great teaching, because both of these stories are powerfully linked in terms of teaching and the point Jesus is making to us as His followers. We spoke of the "Home" and "Away" last week ..... and how the Elder Son, who claimed that he was at home all the time with his father, was in point of fact maybe further away from his father than his younger brother !

Jesus told them this story to really delve into the Respectable Sins ..... Confronting the Sins We Tolerate ... He was very clear in His teaching, but most of His listeners didn't get the teaching ..... and indeed the same can be very true for you and me. We hear the teaching, but we settle for a superficial interpretation and application of the story. Remember the context of His telling the story ..... The Pharisees and Scribes began complaining : "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. How could He do that ? How disgusting ?" So, Jesus tells the story of the Father and his two Sons. The story was real simple and yet real difficult, at the same time ..... you call that COMPLEX , right ?

Here is the complexity ..... He says this father had two sons. The first (Younger Son) represents sinners, those that you despise .... and you are distraught that I am eating with them. This father has a second son .... that is YOU ..... Wow..... they didn't get it. They couldn't. They were blind. They did not know themselves. But, He knew them. They could see the speck in the brother's eye, but could not see the beam in their own eye! They were miserable ....and He was miserable, too. Where is the Peace in that?

The message was — this Father ..... His Father..... loved both of His Sons ..... His Father .....Our Father..... loves ALL of His sons and daughters ..... It matters not the color of their skin, their country of origin, or family of origin, their religious experience or expression, their sexual gender or sexual orientation. He loves ALL! If you want to be like Him, then it is going to require a huge change. You cannot sit over here on your righteous perch and make judgement on all sinners. What He was saying in simple terms was : 'Be very attentive to those Respectable Sins .....those ones we Tolerate. Leave the judgement to Me and to my Father. For He, and He alone, knows the heart.

The true identity of the follower of Jesus Christ is that there is no separation .... there is no "Home" and "Away" ..... They are One ! I am you, and you are me, and we are the Universe .... His Universe ..... His kingdom ! Our Mission is not to divide or separate. Our Mission is to UNITE. To unite in Him ! Bring all things together in Him !

I love what Pablo d'Ors, a Spanish priest, says was the result of his meditation practice :

*“Thanks to Meditation I have continued to discover that there is not I and the world, but that world and I are one same, sole thing. The natural consequence of such a discovery — — and I do not think one has to be very sharp to guess this — is compassion toward every living being; you do not want to do harm to anything or anyone because you notice that you would harm yourself if you did so. The tree cannot be cut with impunity, without asking its permission. The earth cannot be removed from one place to be used in another without paying some price. Everything that you do to other beings and to nature you do to yourself. Through meditation, the mystery of unity continues to reveal itself to me” !*

Wow !

So, now we look at today's Gospel and its teaching ! Here are the obvious pieces in the Gospel :

1. The scribes and the Pharisees ..... the same people we encountered in last week's Gospel saying : “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” This time they are more direct .... they are confronting in their approach ..... they set a trap.
2. Their words have proven useless .... now they revert to the oldest trick in the book ..... they come ready to throw stones.
3. They see no way He can avoid this conflict. He either supports the enactment of the law or He does not. If He opposes the law, then the authorities will take care of Him..... and get Him out of our sight.
4. But it was a trap ..... Let's look with open eyes .....  
It WAS : a ) A man's world ..... man-made laws. No punishment for the man ..... stoning to death for the woman. What's wrong with this picture?
5. God Bless her ....the poor woman ..... perhaps she was abused many times before by men ..... now she is being abused by the Religious Leadership .... being used to try and deceive 'The Holy One.'
6. “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery .....(Just the way we planned it)
7. Oh ..... so you are about the law, eh? The law is your saving grace. Then, go right ahead and enact Your Law... but, a little proviso... Let the One Without Sin .....

It was such a powerful teaching, and it has withstood the test of time. It has never been challenged and found to be untrue, and there has never been one to knowingly risk the consequences of such an action! It brings all of our righteous behavior to task! It's a pretty unparalleled teaching in the Ministry of our Savior. And, while many don't want to accept it ..... It still remains the greatest equalizer among ALL followers of the Christ.

a) It is only in this context that we can truly understand the real teaching of Our Savior.

b) It is only in this context that we can understand some of the greatest Parabolic Teachings of Jesus. Stories such as :

- 1) The Prodigal Son.
- 2). The Laborers in the Vineyard.
- 3). The Merchants search for fine Pearls.
- 4) The Banquet
- 5). The Rich Man and Lazarus.
- 6). The Shepherd and the Lost Sheep
- 7). The Master settling accounts with his debtors
- 8). The Parable of the Talents

Let me finish with another insightful quote from Pablo d'Ors :

*“If water does not flow it stagnates and smells bad; we all know that. All life that does not flow rots and smells bad too. Our life is worthy of the name only if it flows, if it is in motion. Because of cowardice or laziness or even inertia— although it is almost always fear that most paralyzes us —we all tend to stay still and, furthermore, to dig our heels in. Digging our heels in is not just staying still; it makes any future motion more difficult.”*

What a Beautiful summary of the Gospel today, and also of our wonderful .... powerful study that we are just completing this week — Respectable Sins : Confronting the Sins We Tolerate ! Wonderful Stuff !

—Fr. Gerry Hurley