

HOMILY 4TH SUN LENT YRC 2019

The Gospel reading today, the Prodigal Son, is very rich in meaning. The person who really stayed with me this week was not the Prodigal son, but the older brother. At first glance I sympathized with the older son. He was loyal to his family; he did everything a good son should do. And when his brother gets back he is rewarded for abandoning and shaming his family, squandering his inheritance and living this immoral life. No wonder his brother is angry, but let's take a closer look at the situation.

First of all, according to Jewish law, as the older brother he would inherit more than his brother. He would inherit 2/3 of his father's estate. Children were supposed to wait until after their father died to inherit, and since the younger son took his inheritance early, there was a penalty for that. So the older son was to inherit most of the estate. As his father told him, "Everything I have is yours." His younger brother returning did not affect that. The younger brother squandered his inheritance and he would not inherit any more. The older son staying with the father and taking care of things was in his own best interest. He was taking care of his own inheritance. It does not appear that he was taking care of things out of love for his father. If he loved his father he would have gone to the party for his brother to make his father happy, but he did not. And the older son was missing out on the party that he said he wanted to have with his friends. I am sure his friends were at the party. They were not with the older son, he was alone. Was the older brother jealous of his brother? Jealous of what? That his brother had lost his inheritance? That his brother lived an immoral life? Did he think that his father could only love one of his sons? Did he want to see his brother punished? It seems that he was only hurting himself by hanging on to the anger.

Things could have been much different. He was getting his brother back. His brother had repented and now he was ready to work to take care of his father and the estate. The brothers could help each other, and this would make their father very happy. Could the older brother love his brother

enough to let him make his mistake and still love him and welcome him back? His father did. Now he made it very clear to his brother that he has judged him and is angry. Will the older brother be able to let go of his anger? If not they will never be able to reconcile and work together.

I think we need to love our family and friends enough that even when they make bad choices we can love them and welcome them back. When someone made a mistake and has learned from the mistake as the younger son appears to have done, will it help him to get a lecture? Will it help him to be punished? What he really needs is to be loved and helped. Anger is a feeling and sometimes our initial reaction is anger, but holding on to the anger never leads to anything good. Are you holding on to anger in your life? Is it time to let it go? Are you just hurting yourself?

And many of us have done what the younger son has done and walked away from God. Praying and coming to church doesn't seem to have much of a payoff at times. I am going to take things into my own hands. Sometimes when we are away from God we make some really bad decisions. Sometimes we need to live with the consequences. Sometimes it is hard to get our lives straightened out. But we can always come back to God. He will welcome us back just like the father did in the Gospel passage. We also can come back to the Church. As Pope Francis has said, the Church is a field hospital for sinners not a hotel for Saints. For that to be true it is up to all of us. We are the Church. We need to have a community at St. Edith that is real. Some of our struggles are more public than others but we all have our issues. We need to welcome everyone and withhold judgment. Then we can have a community that helps one another.