Saturday of the Second Week of Lent

Gospel text (*Lk* 15:1-3.11-32): Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So to them Jesus addressed this parable. "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' So he got up and went back to his father.

While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly, bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became

angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, 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.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

"I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you'"

Fr. Jordi POU i Sabater

(Sant Jordi Desvalls, Girona, Spain)

Today we see mercy, the distinctive note of God the Father, at the moment when we contemplate an "orphaned" Humanity, because—forgetful—it does not know that it is a child of God. Cronin speaks of a son who left home, squandered money, health, the family's honor... and ended up in prison. Shortly before his release, he wrote home: if they would forgive him, they should put a white handkerchief on the apple tree, touching the railroad track. If he saw it, he would return home; if not, they would never see him again. The day he left, upon arriving, he didn't dare look... Was there a handkerchief? "Open your eyes!... Look!" a companion told him. And he was speechless: on the apple tree there wasn't a single white handkerchief; there were hundreds; it was full of white handkerchiefs.

It reminds us of that painting by Rembrandt in which we see how the son who returns, helpless and hungry, is embraced by an old man, with two different hands: one of a father who embraces him tightly; the other of a mother, affectionate and gentle, caressing him. God is both father and mother...

"Father, I have sinned" (cf. Lk 15:21), we too want to say, and feel God's embrace in the sacrament of confession, and participate in the feast of the Eucharist: "Let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again" (Lk 15:23-24). Thus, since "God is waiting for us, like the father in the parable" (Saint Josemaría), let us walk the path with Jesus toward the encounter with the Father, where everything becomes clear: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light” (Second Vatican Council).

The protagonist is always the Father. May the Lenten desert lead us to internalize this call to participate in the divine mercy, since life is a return to the Father.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “The parable of the prodigal son expresses in a simple but profound way the reality of conversion. Mercy is manifested in its true and proper aspect when it restores to value, promotes and draws good from all the forms of evil existing in the world and in man.” (Saint John Paul II)

- “Our God is a God who waits. The Lord is faithful to his promise because he cannot deny himself. He is faithful. And, in this way, he waited for all of us, throughout all of history. He is the God who waits for us always.” (Francis)

- “The process of conversion and repentance was described by Jesus in the parable of the prodigal son, the center of which is the merciful father (Lk 15:11-24): The fascination of illusory freedom, the abandonment of the father's house; ... his repentance and decision to declare himself guilty before his father; the journey back; the father's generous welcome; the father's joy - all these are characteristic of the process of conversion ...” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, № 1439)