

4th Sunday Lent 2010 C

I. Again and again, he rehearsed how he would say it, “Abba...no ‘Father’-that’s more formal, I’ve made a mistake...no, I have sinned against heaven and you, I no longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me as one of...your hired servants”. The scribes and pharisees in the audience listened and nodded in approval. “Can’t be too easy on the boy. The Law demands as much for such immoral behavior. Let him grovel a bit”.

II. The story goes on. No sooner does the father catch sight of the son when he is still a long way off, than he runs to embrace him-very inappropriate for a Jewish elder. He has servants put the vest robe on the son-probably his very own robe; a signet ring on his finger-a sign of trust, and finally sandals on his feet-footwear of a freeman in the household, not a servant. Jesus pulls what the French would call a “Coup de Theatre”-a completely unexpected change in the story that nobody is prepared for. The Father is completely outside the role assigned to him in the strict Jewish Patriarchal Tradition.

III. Suddenly the audience of Scribes and Pharisees is no longer interested in the lost son, but the father who ad-libs lines that no good Jewish father should say in such a situation. If there is a wasteful, extravagant prodigal in the story it’s the father who seems to ignore the son’s disgraceful behavior! In the Ancient world, and perhaps ours too, fathers are not supposed to be be touches. Rarely have I ever know an Irish father to be warm and fuzzy with his sons!

IV. The story basically is about a God who loves his creatures even more than the Law which would have us love Him; a God who is in a constant state of wonder over each and every one of us; a God who seeks not so much to correct as to embrace. Why? Maybe it has something to do

with that verse in St. Paul today. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might be the righteousness of God” (2Cor.5:21). God has sacrificed so much of Himself in Jesus who felt the burden of every human being from Adam and Eve to the last man and woman who will live on this planet that He can’t help but love us.

V. As for the audience of Scribes and Pharisees, standing there with folded arms and sour pusses, how could they feel other than the ‘older brother’ in the story, out in the cold, as the party goes on without even a goat to munch on!