

Greetings to you! The theme for our morning's meditation is 'God has promised forgiveness to the penitent.' In Luke's gospel we notice that the tax collectors and the sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were grumbling among themselves that he was eating with sinners. Jesus uses three parables in Luke 15 to drive home the point that he had come in order to seek and save the lost. The final parable is the parable of the prodigal son.

The parable begins by informing us that a father had two sons. The younger son requested his father for his share of the property so that he can go on his way. The boy is probably in his late teens since he is still single and wants to enjoy himself. This unusual request would have been shocking because normally the property was divided only at the death of the father. By asking for his portion the younger son deems the father to be dead. This is also true in south Asian countries like ours. The son has made up his mind that he wants his portion in order that he may enjoy it now. The interesting thing is that father actually accedes to his request and divides the property among the two sons. Each son received his due and the younger one was free to go.

The younger son got together all that he had and set off to a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. The man spent his money on things of no value. This approach to life will soon lead to his down fall. As long as he had the money there were friends around him but the day he had spent all his money all his friends disappeared. To top this there was a severe famine in that whole country and he was in need. Nature makes his bad situation worse. His world is collapsing with no money, no friends, and no family, suffering hunger in a distant land, the boy is in deep trouble. He knows what it means to go hungry and he has nowhere to turn to.

Desperate for food and funds he went and hired himself to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. The job is unable to meet the prodigal's needs and his hunger. The pods were bitter and without nourishment, and they couldn't sustain him. The son has now hit rock bottom. The picture is one of death and total rejection. It is only when he hits rock bottom that he comes to his senses. Till now he was fooling himself that everything is okay. But hunger, starvation and facing death made him see the stark reality.

Once the son realizes how far he has plunged down, he realizes that his father's hired hands are in better shape than he is. Even the daily wagers in his father's land was doing much better than he was. So the son works out a plan of action and he says, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father and I will say to him, "Father I have sinned against you and heaven; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." The struggling son decides to acknowledge his sin before God and before his father. He knows that he has forfeited all rights to sonship and inheritance, but it is better to cast himself into the father's mercy than remain in a distant land, living a life lower than the unclean beasts and suffer hunger. The confession pictures his repentance, coming to the father bearing nothing but his need. He plans to turn and come home, openly confessing his failure.

The son has already practiced his dialogue because he thinks he is not worthy in his father's sight. He wants to save himself and he wants no grace. The son's request shows that he wants to be a minimal burden on his father but still wants to earn his way back. Repentance is the capacity to forego pride and accept grace.

While he was still far way the father saw his son and was filled with compassion. He ran and put his arms around him and kisses him. The son confesses saying "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the Father's response is completely different. He asks his servants to bring out a robe the best one and to put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. He then calls for a celebration because he says "for this son of mine is dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." The father's love shows us something of the heart of God. God is a compassionate God and he has promised forgiveness to the penitent. Just like the Father let the younger son go on his own way sometimes God allows us as sinners to go on our own sinful ways to hit rock bottom when we are forced to see the reality and turn back to him.

May God help us truly to turn back to him, to leave our sinful ways behind, to confess our sins, seek his forgiveness and to follow him faithfully all our lives.