

The Pray More Lent Retreat Study Guide

The Prodigal Son and the Merciful Father

with Scott Powell

Reflective Questions

“And the father said to his servants: Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet” –Luke 15:22

1. In the ancient world, your value as a teacher (as Jesus was, a Rabbi) was based upon your ability to quote and share the wisdom of the past with your students. Stories of a father disciplining and casting out his misbehaving sons were commonplace—just like the understanding that there were rules God as a father expected his people to follow. Jesus turned the expectation of a father’s role as condemning on its head, however, and shared a loving and forgiving version of fatherhood, just as Our Father in heaven is merciful to us! When you go to confession or do penance, do you feel ashamed to ask God for forgiveness like the prodigal son? Find peace in the knowledge that God loves us fully—He loves and will forgive us gladly even when we have fallen into sin.

2. God has been, is, and always will be. There was not a time when God was an angry man with a beard who did not love us and then changed His mind when Jesus came. The Incarnation of Jesus *was* a change: God became 100% human and 100% God. But that was always part of the plan. God has always loved us. Have you ever been tempted to compare God’s actions in the Old Testament and in the New Testament as proof that His temperament changed? “As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.”

3. In Jesus's teaching of this story, the father was watching for his son to return to him and he *runs* to him—in all his robed, bearded glory! The father picks up his son, embraces him, and gives him a ring, shoes, and his robe to illustrate to everybody that he accepts the son back into his household. When we return to God through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, He accepts us warmly and immediately back into His grace. Have you ever done something for which you thought God could never forgive you? The truth is, the only person who can keep God from forgiving your sins is you. “Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you.”—Matthew 7:7

4. The world often tells you that you are an outcast, that you're not good enough. That is, after all, how the story of the prodigal son would have traditionally ended (with the father not forgiving and casting out his son). Jesus does not leave us to drown in the voices of the world telling us we are worthless and that our life has no point. He reminds us time and time again through the prophets and through his sacrifice on the Cross and in the Eucharist that He will always be waiting for us to return to Him with His arms outstretched. Do you know who you are? Do you trust that God loves you as His own child, His own creation, and an heir to the Kingdom of Heaven? There is great hope in the mercy of Our Lord, thanks be to God!