



Meditation 2

“The younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance in a life of dissipation.”

The way we inhabit space expresses our emotional world and our convictions in such a clear way that we cannot ignore it. Being inside or outside, near or far, has a meaning that is not only geographic: it is also symbolic, existential, moral. Let us ask ourselves this morning, in our prayer, where we are. Where am I, and where are we as a couple? Inside our family, what place have we chosen to inhabit? Is our "being part of it" really a true and fruitful commitment? Have we helped to unite, weaving the characteristic unity of love, or have we allowed ourselves to be accomplices to a distancing that weakens? The phrase which we read in the parable of the Prodigal Son and which informs us that "the son has set off to a distant country" (Luke 15:13) offers us much light to reflect on ourselves.

Let us focus on today's phrase: "The son set off to a distant country and there he squandered his inheritance" (Luke 15:13). Curiously, in the parable, Jesus does not stop to explain what reasons led the son to make the decision to leave. Deep inside each human being there is an unresolved pain, an ancestral helplessness, an open wound, an abandonment that still hurts and which instead of making us plunge into the affective centre that could cure us, throws us even more into the loneliness of distance, where sterility and fragility get worse. As St. Paul explains in the Letter to the Romans, we often do not do the good we see clearly, but surrender instead to the evil we hate (Rom. 7:19). We must humbly count on this raw paradox in our lives.

Why does the Prodigal Son leave? This is not explained in the parable. I believe that the deep reasons for his departure, which we may also identify in ourselves, cannot be fully explained, but only felt. And they are perhaps, the result of a mixture of things: an unquenchable thirst for living, a desire for autonomy and individuality, and at the same time a corrosive insecurity, a need, a temptation for easy solutions, an escape.

Great works of art often bear witness to this most human pain. I remember a set of sculptures by Michelangelo that impressed me a lot. The sculptor called them "slaves." They have in common the fact that they are unfinished. Michelangelo sketched them only, as if the process of removing them from the stone was meant to remain uncertain. But what you can see there is amazing. In those sharply dramatic



bodies, coming out of the stone, there is a powerful cry that touched me. They are struggling to free themselves from their own imprisonment. So, this unfinished state, where struggle and tension, need and desire, are side by side, is a good representation of our life. There are so many things we do that we cannot explain very well except as being part of a painful fitfulness of the endless forming of who we are. So there is a part of the story of the Prodigal Son that we understand well, because it touches us all.

Consequently, we wonder what love is. To love is to embrace in the other that portion of suffering, that quiet cry that he carries, and doing it without judgment, but with hope. To love is to gently touch that confused and dark background that exists in each one of us. To love is to be willing to wait for the other in an unconditional way. To love is to adopt the passivity of the parable's father, who has no lack of interest for the good of the other, but finds a way of entering into a dialogue with the wound he carries and which conditions him, but whose resolution cannot be immediate. The important aspect of the one who loves is not to give up.

Couples should support each other in this way. In a couple you cannot expect perfect people. An obstacle to happiness is often the idealized search for a stereotypical perfection, without recognizing that we are real people, of flesh and blood. And likewise, there are no families who haven't been marked by suffering, some carrying a cross many times greater than their strength. But God does not leave us abandoned. And in everything He helps us to make our way. With God, everything is grace.

But the words of the Gospel, "the son set off to a distant country and there he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation", challenge us to a review of our life, because it's so easy to lose sight of the essentials. It is so easy to lose sight of each other in the couple's relationship. Without a permanent effort of attention to our reality, we end up prisoners of routine, we allow the conduct of our life to be done on autopilot and we gradually lose the capacity to activate the deep dimensions of love. We have to ask ourselves if we aren't also dissipating our treasure. This happens, for example, when we relegate family life to second place in our priorities. Theoretically we say that is the most important thing, but then our concrete actions do not show that.

We have to question ourselves if we really strive to value our family life by making our time a true holy place instead of wasting the opportunities that God offers us every day. The adventure of marriage is a wonderful gift. We should experience it as a vocation and a mission that we are called to renew here.