



Meditation 3

“I am no longer worthy to be called your son”

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32), or of the merciful Father as others prefer to call it, throws a curious light on this great laboratory of life and construction called family. In fact, no family stays static all the time. This is because the family is not an idea, but it has the concrete and restless dynamism of experience. The family does not stay frozen as in an image: it changes and reconfigures itself continuously.

Let us think, for example, of our own family. How many different times we have experienced together, how many phases and seasons we have shared! Good and difficult phases; bright seasons full of excitement and demanding winters; times when we have all been reborn and moments of suffering in which we feel we have been tested in faith and in love's reality. We know that what appears endless, when we live it, is often fragile, but that does not make it less beautiful.

The crises themselves are part of the journey of love, and if they bring turbulence and suffering, they are also opportunities to plunge deeper into reality. The important thing is not to be discouraged. The important thing is not to confuse the step with the complete path. Even the experiences of crises when experienced by a couple and by the family can become a reinforcement of a common goal. They give us access to dimensions of life that we have not yet touched, which is not difficult to happen, let me tell you. Let's recall the account of the beginning told in the book of Genesis. When God asks the man "Where are you?" he answers, "I heard your voice in the garden and I was filled with fear and hid because I am naked" (Gen 3: 9-10). In fact, we hide our nakedness even from those who love us the most. We fear exposing our vulnerability and we lock ourselves away in a shell. However, it is in the eyes of those who love us that we can find hope to face our barriers, limits and contradictions, and seek new strength. It is often the crises that make it possible to be attentive to life beyond appearances and to contact the desire that rests deep within us.

I think, therefore, that a change takes place when we accept that we are all vulnerable. It is easy to reproduce a reasoned plan and forget that the other has also a share of suffering. A necessary thing to do is to recognize that in those who have hurt us there are also blockages and wounds. If they did not love us as we wished, it was not necessarily a deliberate act, but due to an even more suffocating story than ours.



That doesn't mean excusing the other but recognizing that he may have reached his limit of human suffering. And that his burning hurt was not specifically intended for me: it was a furnace of inner suffering, amassing, on the verge of bursting.

The parable of the Prodigal Son reminds families that we all need forgiveness. And we need to openly ask for it as the son does. Pope Francis, in one of his Wednesday audiences, spoke of three words he considers to be "the three key words for the family": "please" "thank you" and "sorry." Words that are certainly simple, but difficult to put into practice. Concerning the latter, the Holy Father explained: "When there is a lack, small crevices widen - even unwittingly - until they become deep pits. (...) Recognizing that we are wrong and wanting to repay what we removed - respect, honesty, love - makes us worthy of forgiveness. This is how the disease is prevented. If we do not know how to apologize, then we will not be able to forgive either. In a home where people do not apologize, the air starts to run out, and the water stagnates. Many wounds of affection, many lacerations in families begin with the loss of this precious word: "sorry."

In a couple's life there are often disagreements ... and "sometimes plates are smashed, harsh words are spoken, but listen to my advice: don't ever let the sun set without reconciliation". Hear me, wife and husband, did you fight? Sons and fathers, did you enter into a strong disagreement? That's not OK, but that's not the problem. The problem is when this feeling continues the next day. Thank God, in most cases, just a "sorry", a wink, a smile or a caress are enough. But there are also more complex situations like the one of the parable: "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." The prodigal son dissipated his inheritance in the worst way; by disregarding the family bonds of true love in exchange for futile substitutes ... These are hard blows impossible to forget. Now, we often hear the question: how can I forgive if I cannot forget? The wounds have touched such a depth of our being that, although we desire it very much, we cannot erase the experiences from our memory. But the idea that associates forgiveness with forgetting needs to be dismantled. We don't have to forget to be able to forgive. We can forgive even what cannot be forgotten.

What is forgiveness, then? Forgiveness is a unilateral act of love. It is giving the other not what he deserves for what he has done, but what is in the heart of God. And by doing so, we will gradually realize that we are already free, we are already detached, we are no longer clinging to an evil that has happened. Our heart does not have to be an icy and unforgiving sea. Rebirth and revitalization will happen in Family life. Our enamoured eyes were born to see not the ashes of the twilight, but the new heavens and the new earth.