

Meditation 4

“The Father saw him and had compassion”

Now, the text of the parable forces us look at the Father's figure. Let us settle not only our look but also our heart on Him, and we will discover that this Father is the true representation of mercy. He, who has two children, realizes that He must treat them differently, looking at each one in his own way. The youngest son came to Him to claim his inheritance. It is a strange request because an inheritance supposes the parents are dead, and this son is requesting it, although the Father is still alive. And yet the Father, without saying anything, gives him the inheritance. The Father accepts the space the son needs; the Father welcomes the risk of the son's freedom, He simply loves him. God accepts the risk of our freedom, accepts that we take what He gives us, and that we leave for a far off place. He accepts our possibility of making mistakes, our weaknesses.

Even when he returns, the younger son still does it within a selfish and self-centred logic. He left to experience life, and when he returns, he thinks only that he needs to save his own skin. It is the survival instinct that moves him, not love. The prodigal son says: *“How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him ... make me like one of your hired servants.”* (Luke 15: 17-19). And he doesn't realize that this is impossible. For when the Father sees him in the distance, He takes the initiative by running to meet him. He considers it a more decisive moment than the son's departure. He has come back; the return is more important than the breaking away. The son is still far away and the Father sets out to meet him. Saint Luke tells us: *“his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him”* (Luke 15: 20). That is, it offset that life without joy and made it completely loving. In the eyes of the Father, that son was simply His son, His own son. And, full of compassion, He hugged him repeatedly, and reintroduced him into the family intimacy. And He did it in a way that the son himself would never have expected.

We can say: "This father has exceeded himself. His love is too deep. He should not treat his son like that. He should punish him or at least put him to the test, make him think. And then say to him, "Now suffer and think about what you have done." The Father's excess, this excess of mercy, has, however, a meaning. Many models and ways of reacting are in conflict, inside us. But what God tells us is: "Mercy is the art

necessary to save life, mercy is a path we all need to learn." And there is no mercy without excess. I firmly believe that this is one of the fundamental lessons of the parable.

We often ask ourselves "what is mercy?". And mercy does not fit into any definition. It has to be incarnated so that we can touch it. Mercy is compassion, mercy is kindness, mercy is forgiveness, mercy is putting yourself in the other's place, mercy is carrying the other on your shoulders, mercy is deep reconciliation. It's all that. But this is also accomplished with a certain style, which is the style of the father in the parable. There is no mercy without giving, without gift. That prodigal son who had so many obvious and hidden wounds, needed to be cured with the balm of mercy.

We easily tend to judge others: "Ah, you did this, you deserve this, you deserve that." But the merciful father does not let himself be trapped into judgment. He sees that the son returns as if coming from a war, completely shattered, mistreated and wounded. Now, if there is not an excess of love that helps to heal his wounds, that gives him another horizon, that is a lever, there will be no solution. The son could not enter the house on his own two feet. He needed to be carried in his Father's lap, by his Father's love.

Mercy is that. It is not waiting for the other to lead the way: it is to anticipate and carry him on our shoulders as we are taught in the other parable of the good shepherd (Luke 15: 4-7), accepting his wounds, his vulnerabilities and reintroducing him to hope, which is illustrated by the party.

Within the family we have experienced this on so many occasions. If we want to be moderate and impartial people, if we want to be just, we will be good people, but we will not know the Gospel of Mercy. Because the Gospel of Mercy demands an excess of love: that we manage to embrace wounded life, and that we understand everything without having to say much. The father is not insensible. The father realizes that this son spent everything in the wrong way; the Father knows everything. And yet he embraces everything and offsets everything with his love.

The experience of mercy is one of the most demanding and fascinating things in life. But in the end, that son who was lost is a transformed being, modified by love. Today let us pray that our family may become a school of mercy, where we feel that we are walking in the footsteps of Jesus.