

#### 4<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT

Joshua 5:9-12      2 Cor 5:17-21    Luke 15:1-3. 11-32

##### The elder brother

Let us not lose sight of the fact that what prompted Jesus to tell the parable of the prodigal Son was the verbal attack he received from the Pharisees and Scribes.

- ❖ These were the **good ones** of Society, the **prayerful ones**, those that **obeyed** the commandments to the letter.

**NB:** These Pharisees and Scribes gave it out to him for **eating** with sinners and **associating** with them.

- They are a kind of saying: ***“If God means anything to you – keep away from those ungodly people.”***

##### **OLDER SON**

I choose today to **ignore the prodigal son** and speak about that **older son** who represents those godly men that came to challenge Jesus.

The elder son is: the good and reliable one who stayed at home with his father

- He did not take on the licentious life of his brother in faraway places.
- When they tell **the elder son** that his father has organized a lavish party to welcome the lost son, he gets **very upset**.
- His brother's return **doesn't make him happy**, but **furious**. ***“He was angry then and refused to go in”*** to the party.
- He, who had always done his duty and never left home, now **feels like a stranger in his own house**.

##### **THE FATHER**

The father is not amused to see his elder son approach his house as the stranger.

The father goes out to invite him **with the same tenderness** with which he has welcomed his brother.

- He **doesn't shout** or **order**.
- With humble love ***“he tries to persuade him”*** to join into the ***“welcome home party.”***
- It's then that the elder son explodes, making his resentment known.
- He's spent his whole life fulfilling his father's orders, but ***he hasn't learned to love as his father loves***.
- He only knows to do two things now:
  - a) **demand his rights** and
  - b) **put his brother down**.

##### **TRAGEDY OF THE OLDER SON**

Let us look at the tragedy of the older son.

- Yes, he's never left home, but his heart has always been far away.
- Yes, he knows how to fulfil **Do's** and **Don'ts** but he doesn't know how to love.
- He **doesn't** ***“welcome”*** or ***“forgive”*** his brother:
- In actual fact, he doesn't even want to know anything about his brother: He could have remained lost and he wouldn't care!

##### **APPLICATION TODAY**

- Caught up in the religious crisis of modern society, we're used to talking about **believers** and **non-believers**,
- about **practicing Catholics** and **lapsed Catholics**,

- about **marriages blessed** by the Church and **couples living together**.
- ❖ While we keep classifying God's children, **God keeps waiting** for us all.

**Q: Why?** God isn't property of believers, good people or of practicing Catholics.

The same God is Father of all, including non-believers, lapsed Catholics, couples living together

### **SELF EXAMINATION**

**"The angry protest"** of the elder brother invites us to examine **"our own attitudes"** to outsiders, to those who are on a different path from us.

Q: Do we think that we deserve better from life than other people?

Q: Do we practice the **"faith as a duty"**, while **"resenting the mercy"** that God offers to sinners who repent?

Q: Or are we trying to form **a welcoming parish community** that is willing to

- a) understand and
- b) encourage whoever wants to join the family of the church,
  - no matter where they come from, or
  - what they have done in life?
  - no matter their orientation in life?

Q: In other words, are we people who **put up walls** rather than **build bridges**?

Q: Do we **offer help and friendship** or

: do we look on others **with suspicion**?