

## The Door of Repentance

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**Gospel:** Luke 15:11-32: *And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet*

*thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.*

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

This scriptural passage raises in us many questions. What makes, for example this father respect his younger son and give him his share of the inheritance, and bid him farewell, when the latter decided to depart?

Was it his love? Love respects freedom, even if we, being free, wander away from the truth.

What is the reason behind the continued patience and hope of the father waiting for the return of his son? Was it his paternal affection?

What moved this father to welcome his younger son with honor, kissing him and going out to meet him, instead of judging him for his past doings? The answer is his love.

How deep was the love of this father. For he also begged his older son to share in the joy of his brother's return! His great love is for all.

Who is so great as you, O lover of mankind! The Heavenly Father is "Love," as the Apostle John knew

Him. There is no other word that characterizes Him more than this word.

All the above questions are easy to answer. The harder question, however, is what moved the son to rise and return to his father?

There are two answers to this question. First, it is sin itself. The life of sin is illusory, like the locust. It looks very attractive at first sight, but when you try it, it is very bitter in your mouth. Experiencing sin repeatedly turns into a way leading to repentance. Man was created good by nature, and it is hard for him to live in an evil land.

We know that many lived far from God in their "locust of sin." They did not change and the illusion of darkness remained their guide. So the most important reason for the son's repentance and return is the following answer.

The Father being a person of great compassion is the second, but more important, reason for the return of the son. In the land of alienation where there is no one to give him even scraps, it was inevitable that the son remembered the love, compassion and purpose of his father. This sweet and heavenly spirit of his father poured into that miserable man's weak joints and revitalized him, raising him up again!

This is the door of repentance, the pouring out and overflowing of the eternal heavenly love.

The compassion of God wounds us when we become estranged. The cutting sword of God is His infinite love. We pray in the ninth hour:

The bread of life that sustains man is the heavenly love.

If we humanly thought about the words of Christ, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," we would indeed understand that Christ meant to express something else, "Come unto me all ye that labour... that I may rest!" My beloved, God is always burdened when we are not at rest. When we are not living our life honorably, as God intended us to, it is not just we who are in pain, but God also, and much more.

When we sin and alienate ourselves from God, He is not zealous or vengeful in judging us. His zeal is concentrated in caring for us, the work of his hands. He has adopted us in His fatherly love and wants us to live, and live abundantly.

In the epistle we heard today, St. Paul wrote, "You are the temple of the living God." The Lord has expressed his disposition towards this temple saying, "The zeal of Thy house has eaten me up." We are the temples of God and God cares zealously for these temples. When we sin, God zealously calls for our return.

There is a story from the Monastic literature that once the devil appeared to one of the monks and said to him, "You God has beaten us! We try to devise plots and invent tricks, laboring for years and years to take away someone from your God. And if a monk one falls once and we capture him, God returns him in one move, as if all our work was in vain! Your God has crushed us!"

How great is the mystery of the love of God, and how great are the doors of repentance, that is to realize when we sin that we do not deserve a punishment but the love of God will be poured into us more and more. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. "Open to me the doors of repentance O giver of life." This is the door of repentance: the divine zeal and love. "Open to me the doors of repentance that you have established for me," say the prayers of preparation for communion.

This is what we have learned from the heavenly Father through the history of mankind. In spite of its language, stories and history, the Old Testament's single and essential subject remains that the lost man is respected. At the same time he is wanted by the divine zeal, and the love of God follow him till the end, even if it means the latter must sacrifice His only begotten Son.

This is what we experience in all our life and in all the instances we stray far from God. And how numerous are these instances!!! And how easy is forgiveness. It suffices to have the will to do it. "Repentance is the hatefulness of sin," says Saint Isaac the Syrian. Hate sin and you will have satisfied and made peace with God.

This is what we experience in every moment in prayer. After we have wandered far off, if we just ask in peace and prayerfulness about the reason behind our return to our heart, the answer would be that we know we have an encounter with God, and He is there waiting for us. The caring zeal of Jesus towards our hearts has eaten Him up!

The mystery of our encounter with God after we wander off is that the Father is standing at the door waiting to come out and fell on our neck, kissing us with the kiss of peace.

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father..." I arise and go for you are waiting for me. I go because your love which is poured in my heart has wounded me.

Amen.