

Catechism Story 42

*The Office of the Keys and Confession
Memory Verse and Catechism Prayers from the Congregation at Prayer*

BIBLE STORY: THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Luke 15:11-32

Central Thoughts

- The younger son is like the baptized Christian who squanders God's love in Christ and wanders away from his Lord to follow the appetites and desires of his flesh.
- The older son is like the baptized Christian who denies his faith in Christ by refusing to forgive his brother, squandering God's love in Christ by a pharisaical works-righteous faith.
- The Office of the Keys and Confession teaches us that God's love in Christ is constantly calling us to return to our Baptismal identity in daily contrition and repentance.
- Contrition and repentance, whereby we return to God to confess our sins, is a miracle of God's love for us in the Gospel.
- God has love and forgiveness for us in Christ prior to any act of contrition, repentance, or confession on our part.

Discussion Questions

How many sons did the man have?

Two

Who did each of the two sons represent? (See Luke 15:1-2)

The younger son represented all the tax collectors and sinners that Jesus received and ate with. The older son represented the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes who murmured against Jesus, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

What did the younger son request of his father?

The portion of his father's inheritance that would come to him. It is as if he wanted his father dead, so that he could collect his father's possessions and live as he pleased.

How did the father respond?

He divided to each of the sons the portion of the inheritance that would fall to them at the time of his death.

What did the younger son do?

He left his father's home with all his possessions, journeyed to a far country, and wasted everything he had been given in "prodigal"—sinful, self-indulgent, covetous—living.

What governed the younger son?

The appetites and desires of his sinful flesh.

Could the idol of riches and wild living truly satisfy him as he had believed?

No, he wasted everything. A severe famine arose, he became destitute and joined himself to a foreign citizen to feed swine (the unclean animals in a far-off country), but even then he was hungry and no one gave him anything that could satisfy or rescue him.

What had the prodigal son really wasted?

His father's love.

What began the work of repentance in the prodigal son when, in his poor miserable condition, he "came to himself"?

He remembered his father's love, not only for his two sons, but also for his servants for whom his father had always provided for so richly.

What did the father's love cause the prodigal son to do?

He resolved to return to his father, confess his sins, and ask to be one of his father's servants.

How is the father's love demonstrated for his son, even before he returns home to confess his sins?

The father runs to him when he is still a great way off, has compassion on him, and kisses him with forgiveness and mercy.

Does the father allow him to confess his sins?

Yes, but he will restore him to the family and not allow him to become a servant.

What do the father's actions teach us about God's love and forgiveness for us in Christ?

As baptized children of God who may have squandered God's love, we cannot earn our way back into God's favor. God's forgiveness for us in Christ is a free gift of His grace, His undeserved compassion and loving kindness. The baptismal garments include the robe of Christ's righteousness, the ring of faith, and the sandals of the Gospel of peace whereby we trample the enemies of sin, death, and Satan under our feet. The fatted calf is killed—Jesus was sacrificed for us upon the cross—and repentant, baptized children feast upon the Lord's forgiveness, life, and salvation in the Sacrament of the Altar.

What does the father's love and the prodigal son's confession highlight from the Catechism?

"We cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel..." (3rd Article). God forgives sin for the sake of His love for us in Christ. "Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins; and second, that we receive absolution, that is forgiveness...from God Himself" (Confession)

How is the baptismal new life of repentance and faith in Christ described by the father in the parable?

"My son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

How does the older brother respond to the mercy and forgiveness extended to his younger brother?

He disowned his younger brother, became angry at his father's love, and refused to enter into the communion fellowship to celebrate his father's forgiveness and mercy for his brother who had been brought back into the family.

What does the father do for his self-righteous older son that was similar to his actions toward the younger son?

His father went out to him and pleaded with his older son to come into the fellowship on the basis of his mercy and love for both of his sons.

Of what did the older son boast that was the reason the Pharisees and scribes murmured against Jesus for receiving sinners and eating with them?

He boasted of his own righteousness and accused his father of evil for having forgiven his younger brother.

How does the father underscore his unconditional love for his self-righteous older son?

He calls him a son, saying, "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found."

Meditation on the Bible Story

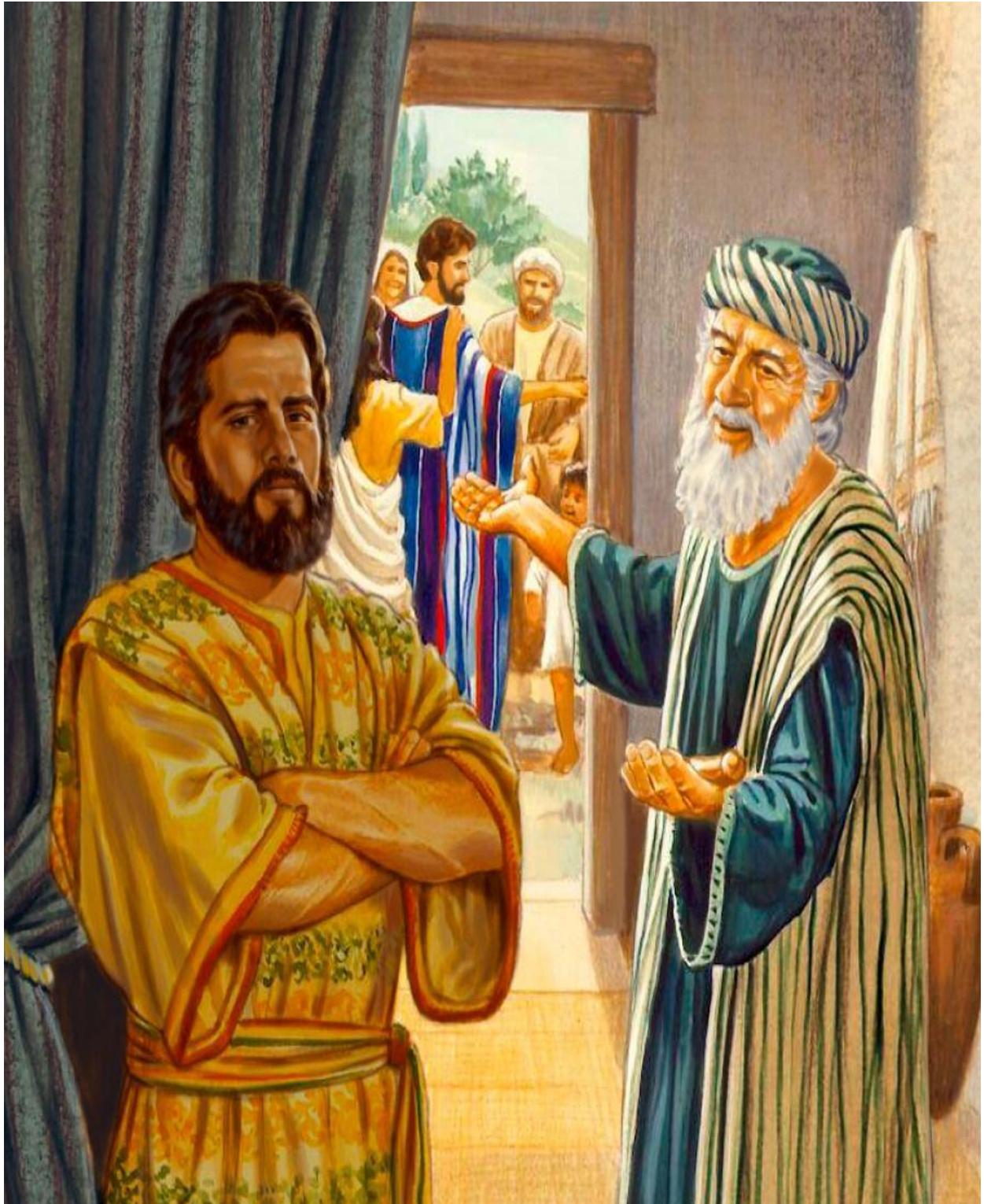
The lavish, undeserved grace and love of God our heavenly Father in Christ is on full display in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Jesus told the parable in response to the works righteous scribes and pharisees who murmured against Him because He received repentant sinners in mercy and forgiveness. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is radical. It is the message of God's love in Christ who suffered upon the cross to redeem and save unworthy sinners. By this Gospel, the Holy Spirit not only calls sinners to repentance in their conversion but continually calls to baptized Christians in their struggle with sin to return home to their heavenly Father. This parable answers the question, "Is it possible for a baptized Christian who has squandered God's love in Christ to be restored to the baptismal family in repentance and faith?" The answer is a resounding, YES! Following the appetites and desires of his flesh could not satisfy the deepest and greatest needs of the younger son, nor could the self-righteousness of the older son give him peace. Christ forgiveness alone reconciles us to God, gives joy to life, and a peace which surpasses all human understanding.

Prayer on the Bible Story

Heavenly Father, when we stray from Your Word and squander Your love like the prodigal son, call us to repentance and draw us home to You, that clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness we might forever enjoy the feast of salvation in the family of the Church, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



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