

MARCH 31, 2019
4th SUNDAY OF LENT

FROM THE PASTOR

THE PRODIGAL SON

This Sunday's Gospel is the story of the Prodigal Son. This is the most well known of Jesus' parables and tells us much about who our God is, who we are, and about how we are to relate to him.

There are three primary characters in the parable—the father, the prodigal son, and the elder son. Each is a somewhat complicated character for such a short story. If this story is a description of God's family, we must conclude that his is a very dysfunctional family. As we look around the world that we live in, and as we look deeply within ourselves, the idea that God's family is pretty dysfunctional is hardly a stretch.

It is hard to understand the complete and absolute selfishness and narcissism of the younger son, the Prodigal. How could a boy who has been raised by a father who is so loving, so generous, so forgiving, and so compassionate have so little regard for his father and for his feelings? Could none of his father's goodness have rubbed off on him? He is so harsh and selfish, treating his father as if he is dead, and asking for his inheritance.

Even after he has fallen upon hard times and is starving to death, he is still thinking only of himself. There seems to have not been a thought about how he has wounded his father and that he must let him know he is sorry. His "repentance" is completely selfish. Maybe Dad will take me in, and I will not starve.

The elder son is also selfish and self-centered, although in a different way. He is very conscious of all that he has done for his father and feels his father has not been generous enough in rewarding him for being such a wonderful son. He keeps close tabs on what he has done and on what his father has done. This boy has no appreciation for how broken his father's heart is over his prodigal son or how filled with joy he is when that boy returns. He does not understand a father's heart and sees this situation only through his own eyes. He has no love for his brother and would have been absolutely okay if his brother had died of starvation. He deserved it, after all. He refuses to enter the father's house because his brother is there.

The father represents God and his incredibly strange way of loving. His love makes no sense to us. He pours out his blessings on his prodigal son, even knowing how completely irresponsible and selfish he is. This son insults him and treats him with absolute contempt, and yet he withholds nothing from him. He accepts this mistreatment with the hope and desire that there is goodness in the boy and that goodness will finally win out.

When the prodigal returns, with his radically imperfect act of contrition, he rejoices to have his son

back even if he is back for all the wrong reasons. What does he care about right or wrong motivations? His son is home. He continues to bless this ridiculously horrible child, putting a ring on his finger, shoes on his feet, and killing the fatted calf to celebrate his return.

The father also loves the elder son. "You are with me always, and everything I have is yours." He leaves his house to reach out to this boy and beg him to come in and rejoice with him over the return of his brother. He wants this elder son to know the joy of love and forgiveness.

There is a fourth character in this story, and it is the father's house. The house represents the father's heart and ultimately, Heaven. The prodigal leaves the father's house, the father's heart—he rejects Heaven—to live his life of profligacy. He returns to the father's house, the father's heart—he opens himself to Heaven. The elder son refuses to enter the father's house. He rejects the father's absurd and reckless love, his heart, and he refuses to live in the community of love which is Heaven. We know that the prodigal came home, but we have no idea about what happened to the elder son. Did he see the error of his ways? Did he re-enter his father's house?

Who are you in this story? With whom do you most identify? With the prodigal who squandered his life, but who came to his senses? Or with the elder son, who has tried to do the right things and feels cheated because those who have been lazy and selfish and sinful seem to be more blessed than you? Or perhaps with the father? Do you have one you love who has broken your heart, taken advantage of your goodness and love, betrayed your trust, and whose return you anxiously await?

This great parable is about us. It is about you and me.

DIOCESAN PARISH ANNUAL APPEAL

Thank you to all who have already pledged and/or contributed to the Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal. It is too early in the process for us to have numbers, so I cannot really report to you how we are doing. Hopefully by next week, we will have those numbers for you.

Our parish goal for the DPAA this year is \$45,900. Please remember that anything that comes in over that number comes back to the parish for our own use.

Please be generous in supporting the DPAA. It helps to fund many important ministries throughout the diocese, including those that serve the neediest of our brothers and sisters.

INVITE A FRIEND TO EASTER MASS

Easter is just a few weeks away. As always, we remember that Easter is a time of the year when many people who do not regularly attend religious services are open to do so. This may include people who have fallen away from the practice of the faith, as well as people who have never been part of a faith community. You and I are surrounded by these people. Some of them are

members of our families, our social groups, neighbors and co-workers.

Please take some time to pray and to reflect on these people in your own life. Ask God to show you if there is someone who he would like for you to reach out to, in a loving and welcoming way, to invite to attend Easter Mass with you. In Cursillo, with which I am very involved, we have a saying: "Make a friend. Be a friend. Bring your friend to Christ." Each of us is called to be an "ambassador for Christ," to allow Christ to use us to reach out to his children with his love and kindness.

For many of us Catholics, expressing a personal invitation to someone who is not attending church is very intimidating. We were not taught to do this, and we are not necessarily sure how to do it effectively. Another saying in Cursillo, along these lines, goes: "Talk to God about your friend, before you talk to your friend about God." If you have someone who you would like to invite to Easter Mass, pray for that person, and pray about them. Ask God to show you how to approach him or her. Ask him to create an opening in which the invitation will be most likely to be well received.

Do not lecture or guilt them. Do not tell them why they ought to be going to Mass (moms and dads, I am talking to you.) Simply ask if they would like to join you for Easter Mass this year. If they say that they would, let them know that you are very happy that they will be doing so. If they say that they do not want to go, do not act disappointed or upset. Be gracious and wait for another opportunity to offer a simple and loving invitation.

Who will you invite to come with you? Sit in prayer and see if God shows you someone he wants to use you to invite.

HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

Holy Week begins in two weeks. I want to make sure that you are aware of everything that will be going on that week, here at Mother of God, and at the Cathedral for diocesan events.

Sunday, April 14 Palm Sunday

9:30 am and 11:30 am Mass

Tuesday, April 16

7 pm Chrism Mass at the Cathedral

Thursday, April 18 Holy Thursday

5 pm Holy Thursday Dinner

7 pm Mass of the Lord's Supper

Friday, April 19 Good Friday

12:05 pm The Passion of the Lord
Stations of the Cross

Saturday, April 20 Holy Saturday

11 am Confessions

12:05 pm NO 12:05 Mass

8:30 pm Easter Vigil

Sunday, April 21 Easter Sunday

9:30 am and 11:30 am Mass

PARISH NEWS

WANTED: SINGERS FOR THE CHOIR FOR

EASTER: We are looking for men and women to sing at the 9:30 Mass on Easter. We will have three or four rehearsals on Thursday nights in preparation for this. Rehearsals will be from 7:30 pm until 9 pm. If you are interested, please contact Andrea or Carole Lonneman at 291-8935 for more information. We would love for you to join us.

FURNITURE DONATION: A new parishioner, living in Panorama, is without furniture. A bed has been ordered, but she could use a sofa and dresser. If anyone has these items they would be willing to donate, please call the parish office, 859 291-2288, and a member of the parish SVDP will get back with you. Also we are looking for a volunteer with a vehicle that could pick up and deliver these items.

HOLY THURSDAY DINNER AND LITURGY:

Please join us on Holy Thursday for our annual dinner and Mass of the Lord's Supper. The hall will open at 5 pm, a pasta dinner will be served at 5:30, and Mass will begin at 7 pm. Cost is \$5 per person, \$10 per family. Donations of wine and soft drinks for the evening are gladly accepted and can be dropped off to the kitchen in the parish hall. Desserts to share are always welcomed as well. Hope to see you there!

NOTICE: Save the date: The annual Mother of God Spring Wildflower Hike at Highland Cemetery will be on Palm Sunday, April 14. More information later.

TICKETS FOR THE EMMET CAHILL CONCERT

are on sale after both Sunday Masses in the back of church. The concert is slated for Wednesday, April 24, here at Mother of God. Tickets for the meet-and-greet (starting at 6 pm), plus the concert (7:30 pm), are \$45. Tickets for the concert only are \$30. You can also purchase them online at www.emmetcahill.com. The Contemporary Ensemble will be performing before the concert, starting at 7:10 pm.

SUNDAY COLLECTION	3-24-19
Envelopes	\$5,854.50
Loose	\$563.00
Online Giving	\$699.13
TOTAL COLLECTION	\$7,116.63

