

## **Dysfunction in the Family**

‘One day the boss wondered why one of his most valued employees was absent but had not phoned in sick. Needing to have an urgent problem with one of the main computers resolved, he dialed the employee’s home phone number and was greeted with a child’s whisper. “Hello?” “Is your daddy home?” he asked. “Yes”, whispered the small voice. “May I talk with him?” The child whispered, “No”. Surprised and wanting to talk with an adult, the boss asked, “Is your Mummy there?” “Yes”. “May I talk with her?” Again the small voice whispered, “No”. Hoping there was somebody with whom he could leave a message, the boss asked, “Is anybody else there?” “Yes”, whispered the child, “a policeman”. Wondering what a cop would be doing at his employee’s home, the boss asked, “May I speak with the policeman?” “No, he’s busy”, whispered the child. “Busy doing what?” “Talking to Daddy and Mummy and the Fireman”, came the whispered answer. Growing more worried as he heard a loud noise in the background through the earpiece on the phone, the boss asked, “What is that noise?” “A helicopter” answered the whispering voice. “What is going on there?” demanded the boss, now truly apprehensive. Again, whispering, the child answered, “The search team just landed a helicopter”. Alarmed, concerned and a little

frustrated, the boss asked, “What are they searching for?” Still whispering, the young voice replied with a giggle ... “They’re looking for me cause I’m hiding”.’

Makes one wonder what punishment awaited that child! Note that the joke didn’t specify whether the child was a boy or a girl. I think girl. It could have been a boy. Whichever, this child caused a huge uproar. If that family lived in a leftist city or state, the authorities may even have confiscated the child from the parents, citing child endangerment due to improperly supervising their child and not preventing the child from hiding. And if the child was in hiding, surely it had ample reason to since it was afraid of its parents! So the state has to come to its rescue and save it from its parents! I’m sorry, but this hypothetical scenario is not in the least far fetched. Children have been forcibly removed from loving homes because their parents were homeschooling them with Christian values!

Now with that sobering thought at how evil and Godless our society has become, let’s turn our attention to another family that is also dysfunctional while at the same time supposedly Godly. Of course I’m referring to the family of the infamous Prodigal Son. Maybe not so much dysfunctional as it reflects a young adult crisis common to all too many families especially in our own day—teenage rebellion. This teenager was now a young adult, with all the rights and privileges of adulthood. On a side note, it’s interesting that since at least the year 714, adulthood in Japan has

been celebrated on a special holiday annually; in modern times every January 15th. But there too, since people have wanted to make Mondays holidays, 成人の日 or Coming of Age Day is now celebrated every second Monday of January, for all people who became or will become 20 years old after April 1 of the previous year and before April 1 of the current year. However, beginning this year, in the central government's all-encompassing wisdom, the age of adulthood is now 18, though 18-year-olds still can't legally drink, smoke or gamble.

But the prodigal son's family had more than just an immature, rebellious young man. They also had an ostensibly "good son", who, in stark contrast to his younger brother, dutifully did everything the father wished. The key adjective here is "dutifully". In Luke 15:29, he says to his father, "All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to". The son declaring he has "slaved" all the years of his life reveals a lack of true familial love. That he didn't really love the family is further driven home by his refusal to join in the festivities, and especially by his words in verse 30, "this son of yours", which doesn't exactly sound very brotherly, does it! So the elder son now brazenly disobeys his father, presumably for the very first time. He refuses to go in. And that's where our Lord Jesus leaves the story. We're left hoping that eventually the elder son will come around. After all, he was the elder son and would become the patriarch of the family once the father passed away.

One would hope that by that time the two brothers would have reconciled and become, well, brothers again!

In this parable, most people tend to identify with the prodigal son, for if we're honest with ourselves, we can not help but to acknowledge that we have rebelled against not only our own families, but most importantly, against our heavenly Father. We have, and in many case still do, take for granted His love and care for us, and follow His commandments and live and serve Him less at His beck and call and far more at what and when it's convenient for us. For we are so often "too busy" for God, for our lives have so many commitments and responsibilities that we find little time to focus on Him. Quite possibly, many of our own parents were like this, and rarely devoted as much time and care on Him or us when we were growing up. I can only imagine the relationship the elder son had with his younger brother. To be so angry at his father that he would refuse to welcome back his younger brother, to not condescend to even be in the same house with him, let alone the same room, reveals a very cold relationship at best. Brothers are supposed to be close, but not these two. While this parable is an allegory, unfortunately it all too accurately describes far too many relationships in the Body of Christ, the Church.

Sure, the younger son had sinned. Grievously. One can picture what he probably well have done in "riotous, wild living". Petty crimes would be prominent on his rap list of sins. Sexual immorality was not an afterthought either, especially when one is

flush with cash and answerable to no one. At least he hadn't killed anybody and wound up in jail with a death sentence hanging over him. Though it's possible he had been incarcerated for a period and been released before or during the famine, that great economic downturn in that country, what all he did is not really relevant anymore. Because the prodigal son repents. He comes to his senses, and realizes what an utter fool he's been, and what a total mess he's made of his life. And he remembers how good life had been back at home. When the worst thing he had to endure was an older brother who at best, wouldn't give him the time of day. And so the prodigal repents, goes back to his father, admits his mistakes, confesses his sin and apologizes, and asks to be taken on as one of the family's servants. Notice his humility. He doesn't even want to be restored as a son, but just to be part of the family again, at the very lowest level.

Now the father in the story, quite obviously representing our heavenly Father and His love, has not forgotten about his younger son. No way. Rather, the father has been worrying about his younger son for all these years, never giving up hope that his boy will come to his senses and return home one day. The father's love for his boy is tangible in that every free moment, he's on the lookout that maybe this day his son will return. If not this day, then the next day. Day after day, waiting and hoping and praying. And then that day arrives. The son comes home! Who wouldn't throw the biggest party possible? And when one celebrates, one

wants all one's friends and family to join in the joy and happiness.

But the elder son can't do it. He can neither forgive the brother, nor the perceived slight from his father. For the elder son doesn't love. This son neither loves his father or his brother. Part of the family he is, but he needs a major attitude adjustment. Why he's done everything right, never complaining, and yet his brother spends years in the glitz and glamour of some rich, exotic land, enjoying all the vile pleasures of sin, and now he has the gall to come back and the father rewards him? How unfair is that! None of us are ever like him, are we? We never begrudge blessings showered on others, do we? We never think, "Why are they so lucky?" Do we? If ever we think along those lines, we must needs remember that Father God loves us, just as much as He loves anyone else. He loves us with a love perfectly tailored to each of us, because no two of us is the same. He made us just so, just as He wished, perfect and very good. As dysfunctional our own flesh and blood families and church families may be, we all have One Father, and One Savior and Lord, and One Blessed Holy Spirit Who lives in us and continually infuses into us eternal life even while our physical bodies inevitably decay and eventually die, releasing us to be joined to our Lord Jesus in paradise, waiting until He returns and resurrects all of us, clothing us with new, imperishable, immortal bodies just like His. And then we will truly see the family resemblance, for we are His younger brothers and sisters, each and every one of us. No dysfunction ever again!

