

Homily for the Second Catechesis
Given by Archbishop Christopher Prowse
Catholic Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn, Australia
Thursday 28th July 2016
World Youth Day
St Joseph's Parish (Jozefa)
Krakow, Poland

Readings

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Luke 15:1-7. 11-32

Let us always remember that conversion takes time. We see in St Paul what seems to be almost an immediate conversion totally to Christ. But for most of us, there are incremental steps along the way of life, where through God's grace and mercy, we move more and more to embrace our baptismal calling in it fullest.

In regard to baptism, St Paul in the First Reading from the Second Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians makes the following comment. "Whoever is in Christ is a new creation ... we are ambassadors for Christ ... (Christ has) given us a ministry of reconciliation."

Let us pray in today's Mass that God gives us a fresh realisation here at World Youth Day that we are a new creation. That the old ways have passed, and that the path of Jesus afresh is given to us in these days of pilgrimage.

To help us reflect on just how difficult that might be for us practically, our eyes can turn lovingly to one of most popular parables Jesus ever gave - The Parable of the Prodigal Son. It is better described really as the Loving Father Who Had two Sons.

But we all know the parable so well. Could I just bring out a couple of points, which I think are particularly helpful for us today in this Mass?

First of all, the father has two sons. The first one, the younger son, returns from a life of selfishness having spent his share of the father's inheritance. Even today, this strategy would be seen as scandalous in any society, surely. To go up to your living father and demand that your share of the family inheritance be given to you now before his death would be seen as scandalous! Yet, this is exactly what the younger son has done. He has now spent all his money and he comes back with mixed emotions and mixed motivations to the father.

The main point of the parable, of course, is to see the merciful nature of the father.

The passage of the Scripture that I love the most is the following: "While he was still a long way off." The father caught sight of the son before the son caught sight of the father. He went out of his home and ran towards his son and "embraced him and kissed him."

Many years ago, a person who reflected on this beautiful passage felt that the most significant thing the father did to the younger son when he returned was to give him, not only a fine robe and a ring on his finger, but most importantly sandals on his feet. When I inquired as to why sandals on his feet were so important, the man said that this is of significance because he gave the means for the younger son to walk out on the father again! When you think of it, it's true. It's like the father giving him the keys to the family car. He gave him the means of walking out on him again... that is a new pair of shoes! The father is extravagant in his merciful forgiveness and is full of joy.

The older son, however, has no problems of an external nature in what he's done, but his problems are more of the heart. He is full of jealousy of the younger son and feels that he has been very hard done by. For a second time, the expression of significance is, "His father came out and pleaded with him." The father pleads with his son outside the comfort of his home. Jesus always comes to us out to the periphery of our life and calls us to conversion. However, having done all this, the father only received an emotional outburst by the older son. The older son is extraordinary rude and totally inconsiderate in his comments towards the father's mercy. Whatever comments he says about the father says a lot more about the older brother. And yet the father just listens and pleads with him by saying, "Your brother was dead and has now come back to life again. He was lost and has been found."

The parable sort of ends in an incomplete manner. We really don't know what happened in the end. There is something in all of us that wants the parable to say, "And they all lived happily ever after!" But that cannot be assured from what we have heard from this wonderful parable. Mercy is an unending pilgrimage towards full conversion in Jesus.

Let us pray in this Mass that we might be able to focus more on the merciful loving father than our own personal situations. Let us not be like the younger or the older brother. Let us really learn from and imitate all that the extravagantly loving father has to offer us in this parable, for this is the way Jesus loves us.