

***The Parable of the Father of the Prodigal Son.*** (Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32)

\* Friends, to be content and humble are the beauties of a man spoken of by our Lord on the Mount, (Mat 5:3,5). These virtues have been highly evaluated and pursued by Christians for centuries. But when I look at the Christian world in North America today, it leads me to believe that the church people have become less contented and more aggressive as they desire something better, bigger, smarter and stronger.

Although some of you may not agree with my opinion due to its subjectiveness, I won't argue, rather I'll tell a story. It's a paraphrase and shortened version of a true story written by Ron Mehl in *One Man's Junk ... Another Man's Treasure*.

\* In order to understand the point I ask you to imagine yourself a person, named, let's say, Cathy or Peter who recently had a garage sale. On a certain day you didn't sell much but you enjoyed getting rid of some junk, especially a heavy one named Harley, the old motorcycle, that came to you for nothing with the purchase of the house in which you are now living. As long as you can remember, that bike was already in a dusty-rusty condition and but it has never been used or driven. Finally, at the garage sale you sold it to Bob for 35 bucks. Bob is your neighbor who recently arrived from Colorado, he is not a rich man and that is why he decided to buy, fix and drive this bike for less. Friends, this story would not be worthy to tell on Sundays if it would not have a lesson, but the lesson is yet ahead. Now don't leave your stage of imagination but be with me in playing Cathy and Peter as the story follows.

\* Last Friday you saw your neighbor Bob rushing from his house. Bob looked like a million dollars, as never before. Being puzzled with such a metamorphosis, you called *Bob*, *What is wrong with you?* He responded with a happy voice, *Cathy, thank you very, Very MUCH!* Upon experiencing Bob's gratefulness, you were puzzled even more. *Could you believe it?*, he continued, *shortly after you sold me the Harley, I called Harley-Davidson just to see what a few major parts for restoration would cost me. By phone I was asked the serial number. So I gave him the number. "Hold on just a second while I look it up, said the dealer. After a few minutes of waiting I found himself getting nervous, but finally the parts man returned to the line and told me that he needed my name, address and phone number. I gave it, but it's getting me nervous even more. What if the bike was stolen, or what if he was in danger of prosecution? Maybe the police were already on their way ... Therefore, I sweated for a couple of days until the company called me back. This time I spoke with a Harley executive. In a very polite manner he asked me for a favor. "Bob, would you take the seat off your bike and see if anything is written underneath?" I grabbed a screwdriver and did as I was told. "Does it have something written there?," asked the executive. Yes, it does, I said. It says, THE KING. There was a moment or two of profound silence on the other end. Then I heard a voice as if it came from the heaven, "Bob, my boss*

has authorized me to offer you \$300,000 for the bike, payable to you immediately. How about it? Do we have a deal?" So, I was so stunned, you can't even imagine! "And what next?" You whispered with a trembling voice. I said to that man, I have to think about that. But today, you cannot even imagine, I've received a call from Jay Leno, the late-night television talk sultan. Leno explained that he wanted to buy this bike for \$500,000 because THE KING was none other than Elvis Presley! I said, that sounds GOOD to me. Now I have to take the bike to a police station to keep it safely. After that he said, I am a lucky dog! "Surely you are!" was your answer. Then Bob went on his way, but you couldn't move, being preoccupied with mingled feelings. From this moment on, we'll stop playing the imaginary game to signify a point. The point originates from your question, *Bob, What's wrong with you?* Actually, there is nothing wrong with Bob, rather there is something wrong with us!

\* Friends, take to heart, and be not filled with jealousy. Bob's excitement and all earthly treasures are not comparable with the real joy and with the real treasures we may have from the Lord. Now we are ready for a critical evaluation of our self-centered characters in the light of this story and the next one that follows.

\* The next story on this Forth Sunday in Lent is the Parable of the Father of the Prodigal Son, (Luke 15:11-32). In fact, Jesus didn't give the interpretation of this parable as he did for *The Parable of the Sower*, for example. Nevertheless, taken within the context of the entire chapter, this longest parable and *The Parables of the Lost Sheep and Coin* were designed with the purpose of exposing the divine and human attributes. To a certain degree the divine and human attributes come together in a realm of emotion, likewise it can be seen in the Parable of the Lost Coin. Here the woman's joy of finding a lost coin is associated with a similar emotion shown in Heaven as a result of one's repentance. In contrast to that law of similarity, the parable of the prodigal son illustrates the contrast between the divine and human attributes for a point of acceptance, as seen where the divine enjoys, the human covets.

\* Friends, you might notice I changed the title of the parable calling it the Parable of the Father who had the Prodigal Son. By doing this, I want my listeners to focus on the father's generosity instead of his son's indignity. Even today, after centuries of teaching about God's grace, the father's willingness to forgive his runaway sons and daughters goes beyond a rational mind, and is not accepted in a practical way. First, we are surprised that such a father in the parable didn't come across as being angry after hearing his son, *Father, Give me my share of the estate*. In many cultures it is shameful to demand a parents' possessions if they are still alive. We don't know how property was divided between the two brothers but, according to Jewish tradition, the firstborn son received twice as much as the other sons. Nevertheless, the younger received his share, probably in cash and then left his family.

\* Because we know the story of the prodigal son very well, I will skip the son's adventure to the distant country. But what I want you to do is to take a more careful look at the father who met the needs of his lost and found son. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him — it proves the notion that the father was continually watching for the return of his son. Certainly, in the father's will we find his longing for setting back the broken relations. The next step forward the father made cannot be explained on the basis of Semitic tradition as, for example it doesn't allow an old man to pull up his robes and run to meet his rebellious son, or to give a hug and kiss to such a son. But in the parable, even though the son had not yet finish his penitential prayer, the father honored him with the best robe, gave him sandals and a ring. In addition to that, he ordered his servant to make preparations for a party. By these acts the father showed his forgiveness, compassion and acceptance. Significantly, with the imagery of the father of the prodigal son, we see our Lord Jesus Christ. In a joyful manner, our Lord accepts any penitent sinner into his royal family. All members of the royal family are former prodigal sons and daughters because as the Scripture says, all sinned and all needed to go through the act of forgiveness and acceptance, (Luk 13:5).

\* Significantly, according to the parable, not all members of the royal house get to enjoy the acceptance and blessings God extends to the penitent sinners, as, for example, the oldest son of the father practiced. The parable says, after hearing the good news, the older son became angry! He didn't even want to come into his father's house to say 'hello' to his young brother. But the son's unfriendly behavior didn't change his father's kindness to him; the father remains the same towards all his children; he went out, just as he had done for the younger son. He pleaded with him to come and share the joy of acceptance and forgiveness. In response to the father's affection, the oldest son complained, accused and cursed his young brother. He refused to accept his brother and to call him by name; he said to the father, *this son of yours*. In a contrasting manner, the younger son decided to go home, while the older refused to enter. But the question, *Did the oldest return to the Father?*, is still uncertain.

\* Dear Friends, as we focus on our Father's character our inner nature is filled with joy as the Holy Spirit witnesses to our spirit that we are the sons and daughters of the Almighty God; His amazing generosity surpasses many expectations; His blessings exceed in number and nature incomparably. Knowing our Father's character we shouldn't worry that in His estate there is a limit of any kindness and goodness, rather we should be aware of sharing the same discontent and pride as seen with the oldest son from the parable. Finally we learned that even a Christian may inherit the Father's estate but, if he doesn't work out His attitude of mercy and forgiveness, then that one may not be allowed to stay in the house of the Lord forever,

(Mat 6:15). Beloved, what wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for me and for you? The answer is beyond our reason.

But we are given more than we understand, we are loved by this great LOVE.

Amen