

Today's parable given by the Lord
Is one of the most famous images in the Gospel,
And is called the prodigal son.

But in truth, the parable should be thought of not as the story of a prodigal child,
But rather,
The parable of the Loving Father.

God is a loving Father. This is something that is not always evident to the World.
Many people, thinking of God,
Imagine an angry man, a judge on the clouds,
Waiting to scorch sinners from the earth.
Others may think that God, if he exists, is a distant father.
One who doesn't concern himself with the affairs of his children.

Yet today, we learn who God is, from the very mouth of God the Son.
The Son reveals the Father.
And that father is a loving father.

When his son comes to him,
And demands his inheritance--essentially saying, Father, I wish you were already dead.
What you have, I deserve. You owe me--give it to me.

The father does not begrudge his son. Rather, he divides the inheritance and gives it to him.
Though he wants his Son to remain in His house, to grow in love and virtue,
He respects his free will, and gives him every good blessing.
This is the story of every one of us.
When we were baptized into Christ, we became true sons and daughters of God.
But at some point, we each say to God--God, I want you to give me what's mine.
Rather than waiting to obtain the good things the Father has in store for us,
We take the things we want, seeking only our own pleasure.
And God as a loving father does not harm our free will,
Or hold us hostage in his house.
He gives us our freedom, even toward destruction.

The parable continues--the young man wastes his riches, falls into poverty and shame, till finally
he comes to his senses,
And decides to go home, expecting to beg mercy,
Hoping only to be a servant.

Yet he is not met by a judge. He is not chastised for his wasted life. He is not lectured.
He is not punished or struck down in anger.
When he returns in humility, the Loving Father runs to him. Runs.
He clothes him. He honors him. He feeds him.

He weeps over his son brought back to life.
This is our God.

When we return to God in humility after sinning, we are not met by an angry judge.
We are clothed with new grace. We are honored with a restoration to the life of the Church.
We are fed with Holy Communion.
We are brought back to life.
This is our God.

Finally the parable shows another prodigal son;
The older brother, upon his younger brother's return,
Leaves the house and stands apart.
He separates himself from the joy of His father, who comes looking for him.
He chastises his father. He complains. He judges his brother.
He makes it clear he thinks he knows better than the Father.
And how does the Father respond?

With patient love. He reminds the older son that "all I have is yours";
He loves the one just as much as the other.
He invites the older brother into the joy of the return of his brother,
The joy of one dead brought back to life.

This is our loving Father.
When we become prideful in our piety.
When we judge those around us,
When we see the sins of others and not our own,
We stand apart from the Church. We separate ourselves from the communion of love.
Even though we stand in the Church building, we separate ourselves in our hearts,
When we fail to love our brother. And yet our loving Father and God still offers himself to us,
Giving us every reminder of his gifts.
Even when we complain and chastise God.
When we judge our neighbors.
When we let God know that we know better.
The loving Father still calls us to repentance.
Reminding us of every good gift.

This is our God.

Whatever kind of child we have been--the one who runs away and lives in sin and filth,
Or the one who becomes hard in heart against his brethren--
Let us turn towards the loving Father.
Because how can we live in His love, if we don't have love ourselves?

In the way he runs to us, to welcome us home, let us run now to him in the approaching season of repentance.

And in the way he seeks us out when we cut ourselves off from the house of faith,
Let us now seek out those whose love has cooled, whether others or our own,
And call everyone to the joy of the feast of the Loving, Good father.