

Fourth week of Lent(c) LK. 15:1-32

An elderly man on the beach found a magic lamp. As he picked it up and started cleaning it, a genie appeared and said: "Because you have freed me I will grant you a wish." The man responded. "I had a fight with my only and older brother thirty years ago. I want to be reconciled with him so that he may forgive me and start loving me." The genie said, "I am glad that you did not ask for money or riches. Your wish is granted. Are you sick and about to die?" the genie enquired. "No way!" the man shouted. "But my unmarried, older brother is about to die and he's worth about \$60 million!!"

Without doubt we can say that this parable is one about the "good father," though we often call it as "the parable of the prodigal son". It is the younger son who is the main focus of commentators and preachers. His return home and the unbelievable welcome he received from his father have moved Christians of all generations. But the parable also speaks about an older son, a reliable fellow who stayed at home with his father, without imitating the licentious life of his brother in faraway places. When they tell the older son that his father has organized a lavish party to welcome the lost son, he gets very upset. His brother's return doesn't make him happy, but furious. He had done his duty and never left home, but now he feels like a stranger in his own house.

The father goes out to invite him with the same tenderness with which he has welcomed his brother. He doesn't shout or order. With humble love "*he tries to persuade him*" to come into the welcome home party. It's then that the son explodes, making his resentment known. He's spent his whole life fulfilling his father's orders, but he hasn't learned to love as his father loves. Now all he knows how to do is demand his rights and put his brother down.

This is the tragedy of the older son. He's never left home, but his heart has always been far away. He knows how to fulfill commandments but he doesn't know how to love. He doesn't understand his father's love for that lost son. He doesn't welcome or forgive him, he doesn't want to know anything about his brother.

We used to talk about the religious crisis of modern society, we talk about believers and non-believers, about practicing Christians and fallen-aways, about marriages blessed by the Church and couples living together. While we keep classifying God's children, God keeps waiting for us all, since God isn't property of good people or of practicing Christians. God is Father of all.

The angry protest of the elder brother invites us to examine our own attitudes to outsiders. Do we think that we deserve better from life than other people? Do we practice the faith as a duty, while resenting the mercy that God offers to sinners who repent? Or are we trying to form a welcoming community that is willing to understand and accompany whoever wants to join the family of the church, no matter where they come from? Are we people who put up walls rather than build bridges? Do we offer help and friendship or do we look on others with suspicion?