

From the Pastor's Desk

"He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.'" (Luke 15:29-30)

The elder son's response to his father's forgiveness in this Sunday's "Parable of the Lost Son" inserts a discordant note into an otherwise feel-good story of a misguided and disillusioned son who is reunited with his loving father.

This discordant note acts as a foil to the parable's tender appeal. The appeal being a father's undiminished love for his son and the fulfilled hope of a chastened, and likely wiser, son's desperate need for his father's love.

The foil to this appeal is the loyal, elder son whose creditable and constant service to his father seems, in the elder son's mind, to have been overlooked and disregarded. He discovers his father's dotting regard for and attention to his reprobate brother as he, the elder brother, is, fittingly enough, coming in from working in the fields.

The joyous reunion between father and son becomes, from the elder brother's viewpoint, one of injustice and outrage.

This discordant note that Jesus inserts into the parable puts an edge on the story and surprises the listener.

This well-found reunion between a son and his father is not the happy event for all involved that a listener would expect. As it is, someone very close to the situation, the elder son, is anything but happy about this reunion.

In his parable, Jesus seems to be telling us that forgiveness and generosity, which demonstrate our love for others, are not merit-based activities.

No one deserves anyone else's generosity or forgiveness; otherwise, it would be something due and owed. I'm not being generous when I pay my bills nor can I forgive someone who treats me justly.

I am generous when I give someone *more* than they are due or owed. I am forgiving when I voluntarily release someone from his/her responsibility for an injury, offense, or debt he/she owes or causes me.

Too often, like the elder son, we place guidelines and limits on what others should be entitled to. We make determinations as to who deserves what or what must be done to merit this or that. The parable uses the elder son's attitude to exemplify this worldly view.

Instead, we are to follow a faith-filled view, which calls us to rejoice in the good blessings of all, especially when these blessings reunite people in a loving community. Everyone is deserving of generosity and forgiveness.

As such, we are not to reserve our love and care for our family, friends, or other special people with whom we get along. We are to accept and welcome all those with whom we have contact and try to gather with them in Christian community - even those whom we dislike or those who have wronged us.

Christ's divine life is a life of community. When our love and care for others fosters Christian community, we manifest the kingdom of God and take hold of our salvation.

-Fr. Brian Kean