

Homily based on the readings from March 7, 2026 (Micah 7.14-15, 18-20; Luke 15.1-3, 11-32)

One of the best ways to learn something about ourselves is to listen to one of Jesus' parables – paying *close* attention to which of the characters we identify with the most. When we hear the Parable of the Good Samaritan, for example, do we identify with the Samaritan, with the wounded man on his way to Jericho, with the priest or the Levite, with the innkeeper, or – God forbid – with the robbers along the road? If we are trying to perform this sort of self-reflection, though, no parable is more *powerful* than the one we just heard a few moments ago – the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Since we are all here at Mass right now – doing what we are *supposed* to do, behaving the way we are *supposed* to behave – it is a fair bet that the majority of us identify, at least at *some* level, with the older son. Even if we are not eager to admit it, I suspect most of us bear a certain amount of resentment toward our friends and family members who have “set off

to a distant country” – forsaking the service of our Heavenly Father, while *we* have remained steadfast in our faith. This kind of response is only natural. Just because it is natural, though, does not make it right. Just as he always *does*, Jesus is calling us to something better.

The main point of this parable, of course, is that God is never willing to give up on any of his beloved children. No matter how *far* we travel to get away from him, God will *always* welcome us home – with open arms and a joyful heart. There is, however, another message that might be easy to overlook: if we are not careful, we can abandon God without actually going *anywhere*. Although we do not really know the *conclusion* to this story, the older son is clearly in danger of doing precisely that. In the end, *he* is the one refusing to enter the house – *he* is the son who deliberately chooses to disobey his father’s commands. The way the older son should act, of course, is exactly the way his father is acting. Not only has the father regained a son, but the son has regained a brother. Sadly, he is so blinded by his resentment that he is *incapable* of sharing in his father’s joy.

All of us, to some degree, are probably a combination of both brothers – the one who stayed and the one who left. Regardless of the particular balance between the two, our objective must always be the same: to use whatever opportunities God gives us to dedicate ourselves *fully* to serving and worshipping *him*. No matter where we have gone or what we have done, our lives must be *rooted* in a foundation of gratitude and humility. None of us has the right to contradict God’s will – or to question his generosity. True obedience means following his example – that of a father who loves his children *unconditionally*, no matter how badly they have injured or offended him. In the end, nobody has the power to separate us from the love of God – nobody except *ourselves*. He will *always* enfold us in his loving embrace, as long as we do not allow our *pride* and our *stubbornness* to push him away.