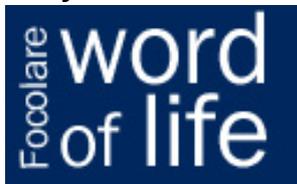


There are no translations available.

“But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found”



(Lk 15:32)

This passage is found at the end of a well-known parable called “The Prodigal Son.” This parable was told by Jesus to his disciples to demonstrate and manifest the greatness of God’s mercy. It closes an entire chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke in which Jesus narrates two other parables to illustrate the same theme. One is the episode of the lost sheep. In order to search for that one sheep, the owner left the other ninety-nine in the desert (see Lk 15:4-7). The other is the story of the lost coin and the joy of the woman when she found it. She calls her friends and neighbors so they may rejoice with her. (see Lk 15:8–10).

“But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.”

These are words of invitation that God addresses to you, and to all those who believe, to rejoice with him, to celebrate and to participate in his joy at the return of the sinner who was first lost and then found again. These words in the parable are addressed by the father to his elder son who shared fully in his life. When this elder son returns home from a hard day’s work, he refuses to enter his house where they are celebrating the return of his brother who had left them to squander his inheritance. The father goes out to his faithful son, just as he went out to his lost son, and tries to convince him to join them. The contrast between the father’s sentiments and those of his elder son is evident: on one side, the father with his immeasurable love and great joy that he wanted everyone to share; and, on the other, the son full of contempt and jealousy toward his brother whom he no longer recognizes as such. He refers to his younger brother, in fact, as “your son ... who swallowed up your property” (Lk 15:30). The love of the father and his joy at the return of his prodigal son serve to emphasize still more the ill feelings felt by the other son who had remained with his father. These ill feelings reveal, however, a cold and — one could say — false relationship between this son and the father. We can deduce from the narrative that it is work and the fulfillment of his obligations that matter most to this son; he does not love his father as a son should. Rather, he seems to obey his father as a hired worker would obey his boss.

“But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.”

With these words, Jesus points out a dangerous trap that you could fall into: that of a life lived for the sake of appearances in search of personal perfection. It can lead to judging others as less perfect than oneself. As a matter of fact, if you are “attached” to your own perfection, you concentrate on building yourself up to the point of being filled with self-admiration. You act like the son who remained at home, who enumerates his merits before his father: “Look, all these years I have served you, and not once did I disobey your orders” (Lk 15:29).

“But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.”

With these words Jesus goes against the attitude of those who see their relationship with God as one based only on the observance of the commandments which is not enough. Jewish tradition is also very clear on this. In this parable Jesus puts the spotlight on divine Love illustrating the fact that God who is Love takes the first step without considering whether the person deserves it or not, but with the desire that the person be open to establishing an authentic relationship of communion. As one can imagine, the greatest obstacle to God who is Love is precisely the life of those who accumulate actions and deeds while God wants their hearts.

“But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.”

With these words, Jesus invites you to extend the Father’s same measureless love toward those who stray. Jesus calls you not to judge according to your own standards the love that the Father has for each and every person. In inviting his elder son to share his joy for the return of his long-lost son, the Father also asks from you a change of heart: you should welcome as brothers and sisters even those people for whom you nurture sentiments of superiority and even of scorn. This will work in you a true conversion because it will purge you of your conviction that you are “better.” It will save you from religious narrow-mindedness and allow you to welcome the salvation won by Jesus as a pure gift of God’s love.

Chiara Lubich

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"Love Your Enemy," in ["The Cube of Love, The Right Way to Start Your Day,"](#) Living City, 2008

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Next month:

October 2011 "Follow me." (Mt 9:9)