Born Again

Born Again through the waters of Baptism, we receive the promise of eternal life. With this great gift comes a great responsibility. We are called to be stewards of the gift, to grow in our faith and to love and forgive others as God has first done for us. Through grave and deliberate sin, we can throw away our inheritance.

The parable of the prodigal son in the Gospel of Luke illustrates how easy it is to fall into sin and throw away everything that is good. The prodigal son has the promise of a royal inheritance, but he wishes his father were dead so that he could enjoy wine, women, and song. He asks in a more politically correct way if he may have his share of the inheritance while his father is still living. The father is so generous that he grants the son’s wish.

For a short while, the son enjoys the good life. While he has money, he has friends. When the money runs out, he is in utter poverty. His friends have used him and they have no interest in helping him in his poverty. He is worthless to them without his free spending habits. One might liken this to the foolishness observed in Fairbanks when stimulus checks arrived and there was a run on the liquor stores by prodigal children. After the euphoria of too much alcohol too fast, one is left with a hangover and an empty bottle. Alcohol being a depressant, one is likely to feel much lower at the end of the day.

Penniless, Luke’s prodigal son takes a menial job and envies the farm animals that are eating better than he is. In his squalor, he is remorseful. He remembers how loving his father was to him. He remembers how good the workers had it back home. He is sorry for his sins and repentant. In his poverty, he is rich for he is now wise enough to see the foolishness of his ways. He returns home to ask for forgiveness and to beg for a position as a hired hand.

The loving father has dearly missed his son. When he spots him from afar, he runs out to greet him. The son barely apologizes for wishing that his father was dead and squandering his inheritance. All is forgiven. The father orders for the royal inheritance to be restored: “Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast” (Luke 15:22-23).

When we are Born Again through the waters of Baptism, a fine white robe is placed upon us. As a sign of our royal inheritance, we are anointed just like a king in the Old Testament with Sacred Chrism Oil. In time, this first sacrament of initiation, will draw us into the Table of the Lord where we may join the feast of Heaven and earth and receive Holy Communion.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve pridefully ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and they lost Paradise. When we commit grave sin, we throw away our royal inheritance. We turn from the love of God the Father and we toss away our heavenly inheritance. Our deliberate sin is a turning from God to do it our way instead of God’s way.

Let us recall the words of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as he begins his passion. “Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will” (Mark 14:36). Jesus suffered and died to set us free from sin. Our generous and loving God is like the father in the parable of the prodigal son. God is willing to forgive a contrite sinner. He is willing to restore our royal inheritance.

The way of love is sacrifice for the good of others; the way of sin is selfishness for one’s own corrupt desire. The devil is a master of deception, so he takes something that is good and pure and from God and makes it look undesirable. He takes something that is bad for us and twists it so that it looks good and desirable. Like the prodigal son, we need to acknowledge our sins with true sorrow. “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son” (Luke 15: 21).
God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconcile
ded the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. Let us recall
the words from the Gospel on Divine Mercy Sunday when Jesus appeared to the disciples. He
breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,
and whose sins you retain are retained” (John 20:23).

Just like the father who ran out to welcome his prodigal son home, God desires, more
than we do, to forgive our sins and restore our royal inheritance. With that forgiveness, the purity
of our souls is restored to its baptismal purity. And the Father in heaven, tells his servants,
“Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast” (Luke 15:22-23).

It is as if we are Born Again through the forgiveness of our sins. Or in the words of our
responsorial psalm: “The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; this day I have begotten you. Ask
of me and I will give you the nations for an inheritance and the ends of the earth for your
possession’ ” (Psalm 2: 7b-8).