

The Elder Brother Speaks



Reflection Ronald Rolheiser

‘Unless we mourn properly our hurts, our losses, life’s unfairness, our shattered dreams...and all life that we once had but that has now passed us by, we will live either in an unhealthy fantasy or an ever-intensifying bitterness. Spiritually we see this in the older brother of the prodigal son. **His bitterness and inability to dance points to what he is still clinging to life – life’s unfairness, his own hurt, and his unfulfilled fantasies. He is living in his father’s house but he is no longer receiving the spirit of that house.**’

Reflection Pope Francis

Let us never tire of also going out to the other son who stands outside, incapable of rejoicing, in order to explain to him that his judgement is severe and unjust and meaningless in light of the father’s boundless mercy. May confessors not ask useless questions, but like the father in the parable, **interrupt the speech prepared ahead of time by the prodigal son**, so that confessors will learn to accept the plea for help and mercy pouring from the heart of every penitent, so that confessors will learn to accept the plea for help and mercy pouring from the heart of every penitent.

Dialogue

'Look at them. Just look at all of them - falling over him as they always did. Have they forgotten everything he did to us?

Nothing has changed – he was always the favourite. I remember how he would steal the attention - making fun of everything. When he spoke - no matter how trivial the comment - Dad's eyes would light up as if it were the most important thing he ever heard.

It was obvious he had no interest in the business. Dad continued to treat us the same. He gave us the same pay. But who was not pulling his weight? Yes - you guessed it - my little brother. There was hangover Monday, Tuesday in fact every day was a 'hangover' day. Who would pick up the slack? Yes – dependable and reliable me. I kept things going when Dad was brooding so much after the 'little prince' left us and with a small fortune – his share of the business – a share he didn't deserve to have – he hadn't worked for it. And now this party when the 'prodigal' returns - it's the last straw.

Hold on now, Fred. You said that your father treated you both the same and you are right. Remember the Christmas when he got both of you bicycles. You got the red - the colour you wanted - and he got the silver one. Think about the time too when you were being bullied at school – who went in to sort it out?

Well - He was always going into the school because he had to apologise so often for Wally's bad behaviour and to keep the peace with the teachers.

Yes but he was there for you when you needed his support.

O.K. but it was nothing in comparison to the number of times he had step in to sort out the problems that Wally always left in his trail. There was no time for what I wanted or consideration of what I was really going through.

Did you come and tell your Dad what was bothering you? Maybe you were too proud to ask for help.

It would have made no difference. Wally took up so much time that I felt left out. I worked every hour I could for the business. I only went out on a Saturday evening with friends and do you think my father ever offered me a party?



I think you are being a little hard on your father. There was a time when you used to sit in the evening with him to discuss all that happened and every morning you two in your own quiet way connected when Wally couldn't put two words together.

Yes – we used to talk a lot. Then things got busy in work and I had to get in early because I knew that Wally would not be pulling his weight. Then in the evening I preferred to chill out with a beer in my room to destress.

And where was your father all these times?

Well he was around of course but we just drifted apart I think. Still he always knew he could depend on me.

And you – did you always know you could depend on him – that he would be there for you?

I didn't feel that he loved me as much as he did Wally. He thought that I had a very sharp tongue – that I was critical – always making judgements about people – I think that's what kept us apart. I didn't feel comfortable with him anymore. He was always making excuses for people – the delivery man, the cleaner and that young girl who did the accounts so badly.

Would you say that you drifted away from him because he could see the good side in everyone but you were focusing on the negative? Is that what's behind tonight's outburst?

I have been here all the time – I don't have my own house or apartment because of the hole in our reserves since Wally got his 'rightful' inheritance. And now he comes back – Dad gets him the best of clothes and this party for everyone even those who thought that what Wally did was unforgiveable - look at them now eating and drinking as if nothing ever happened.

Are you going to keep this up – always reminding Wally of what he has done? Do you think that he may have learnt a lesson when he hit rock bottom? Doesn't he deserve another chance or will he always be 'waster Wally'. Maybe it's time you went in – your father wants you there – his two sons around him again at his table. You were a bit busy to notice the fine food that your father had provided for you all these years. Just as he was always ready for Wally to come home and wishing for it every day maybe he had another wish that you would come down from your high horse and see that even with your critical edginess you were always welcome.

I can't take this mercy and forgiveness stuff – you have to earn it. He should make him pay back everything and start as a junior in the office – that would teach him a lesson.

Fred – your father wants every day to be a party day – his food is tolerance and his drink is compassion. He has been offering that to you all your life. It's like you have chosen the most tasteless food of hate and the bitterest drink of condemnation. You have been the faithful one, the hardworking one, the dutiful son but where is your heart in all this. Where is the love, compassion and mercy that flows from every word your father says and everything he does. He doesn't measure out forgiveness like the barman the drink – he pours it till the glass is flowing over. Of course he was sad when Wally left but he never stopped loving him even when he knew that what he had done was wrong. Did you miss out on that mercy gene?

So I am the one at fault now – I am the one out of step because I am not slapping Wally on the back and throwing my arms around him.

I know you are hurt by what has happened. Your father would do the same for you if you had turned your back on him – in fact he has been watching you very carefully and hurting because you are so hard on yourself and everyone else. Give yourself a break – Fred – try a drink of compassion - you'll be surprised how easily it will slip down – have some fun yourself – it's what your father wants – let yourself go – that high moral ground is a slippery place. Why don't you open your heart to the unconditional love of your father and try not to be jealous when he shows it to your brother no matter what he has done?

Go on – cross the yard – open the door – let Wally off the hook – let yourself off the hook.

