**24th Sunday ordinary Time. Cycle C, 2019**.

The Catholic Church is **not a museum of saints but a hospital for sinners. All of us are sinners**, frail and weak, struggling to walk on the path of holiness. Our membership in the Church does not mean that we become automatically holy. We need the **grace of God e**very day in our life to become holy and perfect. That’s the theme of today’s Gospel…**the story of…**. The Parable in the Gospel text today is popularly known as **“The Prodigal Son”**. However, a more apt title is “**The Prodigal Father**”. This is because the son is prodigal only with material things. It is the Father who is the real prodigal in the story. It is the Father who is lavish and wasteful. It is the Father who is spendthrift, **but with his lo**ve. The prodigality of the father’s love shines through the whole story.

**Demanding his share of pro**perty while his father was still alive would mean the younger son regarded his father as dead. His **selfishness-self-centeredness** led him to focus only on his own wants and needs of the other or family did not matter. Despite his offensive and rude demand, his father nothing holding back gives the younger son what he demands. **For the Father the son’s wants are greater than his own nee**ds. The selfishness of the son reaches its depths when he spends (squanders) all that he receives from his Father for his own pleasure and enjoyment.

This is **the kind of selfishness shown by the people in the First Reading of today** when they make “**gods” of things**. They are caught up in their own desire for pleasure and gratification and **abandoned their true Go**d. However, like the Father in the Gospel today, despite their abandoning God, with the intercession of Moses, God did not bring on them the destruction that was intended. God’s love exceeds mercy and his love is shown in giving people an opportunity to change, a chance repent.

**This is the kind of same repentance is shown by the younger son in action in the Gospel tod**ay. When he is at the lowest depth of his life (**eating animals’ food**), he comes to his senses and realizes that there is mercy and his **father’s love will take him back.** However, the reality of the Father’s welcome goes beyond **the prodigal son’s expectations**. He did not even allow the son to finish his act of contrition that he had prepared….his father does not allow to finish his words of confession…his father does not **need to know how many sins his son has committed**…he does not ask for account of the money that he squandered. It is enough for the **Father that his son who had gone away has returned home.** It is enough that the son, who was lost dead, is now found and alive.

**St. Paul the Apostle experienced this same kind of mercy and love** and he speaks about this **in the Second Reading today. Though** earlier known as a man of violence and a persecutor of the Church, God did not count his sins against him nor hold his wrong doings in front of his face. The same way, here the younger son is accepted totally, he is given due honors, and restored to his former position as the son of the family. The love of the father knows no bounds. **This mercy is intrinsic to God** and is borne out by the name that the **Son of God bears: Jesus**. It is a name which means God saves from sin. It is a name which means God is a loving God. It is a name which means that, no matter how far away we might go, no matter how many graces we squander, no matter how many sins we commit, **God in Jesus, will always love and forgive.**

**If this is the re**ality, then why do so many people find it difficult to believe that God is good and forgiving and merciful? The answer to this question is found **in the attitude of the elder son given in the Gospel today. For** him, like many of us, the relationship with his Father is one of barter exchange rather than love. **He does not address his father as father or brother as brother.** He distances himself from both and attaches himself to his own merit and fidelity. He argues his case on the grounds of what he thinks rightfully deserves and pointing to the failings of the younger son.

The elder son represents all of us who think we can make it on our own and must be proud of the kind of lives we live and God must reward us for the good we do. But the irony is even to persons such as these, God continues to reach out in love…**the prodigality of God’s love…lavish…killings us..with love**… God continues to make such people realize that good actions must be the consequence of having received God’s unconditional mercy and love. They must be the result of having been loved. **All persons must love and forgive unconditionally because that is the way God loves and forgives them.**

**May be in the light of today’s Gospel**, this can be for us a Sunday of reflection, assessment and correction. If we have been in sin, God in his mercy is ready to receive and welcome us back, no less than Jesus welcomed sinners in his time. Let us pray today that we will allow God’s love and forgiveness into our lives. **As forgiven prodigals**, we must be forgiving people too to extend this forgiveness to others who offended us so everyone may embrace **Jesus’ welcoming Spirit.**