

EPISODE 10 – A Beggar in his Own Palace

total running time: 11:33

Father and son (⊕ 5:10)

And the swineherd threw his arms around Telemachus' neck and he kissed his forehead, and the left eye, and the right eye, and the lips, and the left hand and the right hand. Like a father honouring his son, the swineherd honoured his prince. And Odysseus, sitting on the stool by the fire, looked up and he saw his son Telemachus for the first time in nineteen years. And he
5 said nothing. But he got up to his feet and he offered the stool. And Telemachus said, "No, no, old man, you are a guest here. To me this is more of a second home. Sit down, sit down!" And the old beggar sat down again and Telemachus walked across and he squatted in front of the fire and he warmed the palms of his hands. And Eumaeus prepared breakfast for the three of them. And they sat down and they ate and they talked, and Telemachus told them about his
10 journey to Sparta, about his encounter with red-haired Menelaus and beautiful Helen.

And when at last the meal was finished, Telemachus turned to the swineherd. He said, "Eumaeus, my mother Penelope will have heard of these plans to murder me on my return and her heart will be wrung with worry for me. Please, I beg you, go and tell her that I am safely home."

15 And the swineherd nodded and he strapped on his sandals. And he got up to his feet and he made his way across the floor of the hut, and he pushed open the door. And as he pushed open the door Odysseus saw, standing outside, owl-eyed Athene, her grey eyes blazing with light and she was beckoning to him. And as soon as the swineherd was gone the old beggar got up to his feet and he nodded to Telemachus. And he hobbled across the floor and through
20 the door, and he closed the door behind himself. And Athene said, "Odysseus, listen, listen! The time has come for you to reveal yourself to your son." And she reached across and she touched his shoulder with her hand. And straightaway the light came back into the eyes, the auburn curls returned, the broad shoulders, the thick arms, the beautiful cloak over the shoulders.

25 And Odysseus turned and he pushed open the door. And Telemachus got up to his feet. He said, "Who are you? You're not the man you were! Are you one of the mighty gods who rules over the broad skies?"

And Odysseus said, "Telemachus, I am no god. Look into my face and tell me. Do you not see something of yourself?"

30 And Telemachus came across and he looked into the stranger's eyes. And suddenly he said, "It's you! It's you! You are home at last! When did you get here? How long have you been here? How did you get home?"

And Odysseus said, "Telemachus, my son!" And he took his son in his arms and they sat down together in front of the fire and all that day Odysseus told his son about his adventures on the
35 fields of Troy, his great journey across the broad face of the world. And then as the afternoon began to darken to evening he said, "And now my story draws to its end. Though whether it is

a comedy or a tragedy lies still in the lap of the mighty gods and goddesses. Telemachus, tell nobody that I am home, not even your own mother. Tomorrow, I will go to my feasting hall myself and see what truth there is in these stories that I have been told. And you, my son, you
40 must go there also. You can be sure the cowards, the suitors, will not dare to harm you in broad daylight!”

And Telemachus nodded and at that moment they heard the sound of the swineherd returning home and Athene, invisible, reached into the hut. She touched Odysseus’ shoulder, and there he was an old beggar, dressed in rags. And the door opened and in came the swineherd. And
45 he prepared supper for the three of them and they sat and they ate and they talked. And then they wrapped themselves in their cloaks and they lay on the floor in the firelight, and they slept.

***A prince’s homecoming* (☺ 3:27)**

And the next morning it was Telemachus who was the first to make the journey across the island and up the hill to the feasting hall. And already the suitors were gathered – eating, feasting, drinking, talking, laughing, singing. Telemachus came to the door. He stepped on the threshold stone, he lifted the latch, he pushed the door open. And the suitors fell silent. They
5 stared at him. And Telemachus said, “Yes, it’s me. Perhaps it was my corpse you were hoping to see, carried through these doors, laid out on one of the tables. Or maybe my ghost, my shade, walking through the closed doors. But no, it’s me – skin, flesh, bone and beating heart.”

And he made his way, threading between the tables and up the stairs to his mother’s bedchamber. And when Penelope saw Telemachus she ran across and she threw her arms
10 around his neck and she soaked his shoulder with her tears. And Telemachus told her about his journey to Sparta. He told her how he had met red-haired Menelaus and beautiful Helen. He told her how Menelaus had told him that Odysseus was being held captive by a nymph called Calypso on an island far, far, far, far across the blue waves of the sea. And Penelope shook her head. And she said, “If he was going to return, if he was destined to return, I feel
15 sure he would have returned by now. And now the time has come for me to choose a new husband. But which one to choose? And how to choose him?” And Telemachus swallowed the urge to tell his mother the joyful news.

Meanwhile, Odysseus, in the shape of an old beggar was crossing the island. He came to the hill. He began to follow the path towards his hall and everything was exactly as he
20 remembered it, except for the sound of drunken laughter coming through the closed doors. And as he climbed the hill he passed a dung heap. And lying on the dung heap there was an ancient dog. And when the old dog saw the beggar, it lifted his head and it sniffed at the air and its old leathery tail began to wag. And it lifted itself onto its thin legs and hobbled across and it licked the old beggar’s hand. And Odysseus looked down and he recognised his old
25 dog, Argos, who he had trained as a puppy all those long years before.

But in the moment of the old dog’s happiness, death struck. And it fell lifeless onto the grass at

his feet. And Odysseus reached down and he lifted the dog tenderly in his hands and he carried it across and laid it on the soft grass. And as he looked at the dead dog, he remembered the welcome he had imagined for himself all those years before.

***A beggar's welcome* (☉ 2:56)**

And then he climbed the hill and he stepped onto the threshold stone, and he lifted the latch and he pushed open the door of his hall. And his ears were met with the sounds of drunken laughter, and his nose with the smell of sweat and smoke and spilt wine and roasting meat. And in the shape of a beggar he went from table to table begging for food. And not one of the
5 suitors, not one of the feasters took any notice of the old beggar until he came to a table at the back of the hall. And there was a suitor whose name was Antinous. And when he saw the old beggar he said, "Go and take your filthy, flea-bitten, moth-eaten carcass elsewhere before we throw you to the dogs!"

And at that moment Telemachus was coming down the stairs from his mother's bedchamber.
10 And he said, "Antinous, not only do you eat us out of house and home, you also break the sacred laws of hospitality in my father's feasting hall. Old man, come, sit down." And Telemachus showed the old beggar where he could sit and he fetched meat and bread and wine and he broke the bread with his own hands and gave it to the beggar. And gratefully, Odysseus ate and drank. And then he got up to his feet and he went back to the table where
15 Antinous was sitting. And he stretched out his hands, and he said, "Perhaps now you will reconsider or do you begrudge an old beggar the crumbs from another man's table?"

And Antinous looked at him and he said, "I'll give you something. I'll give you something and no mistake!" And he picked up a stool and he drew back his hand and with all the strength of his arm, he hurled the stool at the old beggar, struck him on the shoulder. But the old beggar
20 didn't falter or fall to the ground. He stood firm and the stool clattered onto the floor at his feet. And then the old beggar turned and he walked across the feasting hall. He sat down among the shadows by the door, and he brooded in silence.