

24C

There was a programme on the Telly recently about Mums and Dads who walk out on their family. One man had split from his family while his three children were still quiet young. The interviewer asked him if he was sorry, and would he ask their forgiveness now that they're older. His reply was: "Why should I"?

Having come to his senses, the tear-away son declared, "I will leave this place and go to my father". Is there any place which we need to leave, is there anything we need to turn away from, is there any person we need to forgive or ask forgiveness of as a prelude to us receiving the mercy of God.

The Father is always waiting for us to return and will never turn his back on us even though our sin has brought misery to others. St Pauls stresses this in the second reading. "Jesus came into the world to save sinners, I myself am the greatest of them and if mercy has been shown me, it's because Jesus meant to make me the evidence of his infinite patience". God keeps offering us opportunities to repent but a lot of the time we find excuses not to.

David in the Old Testament is another example of God's patience. He stole Uriah's wife and then had him sent into battle where the fighting was fiercest so that he wouldn't survive the onslaught, which is precisely what happened. David was guilty of infidelity and murder but after pouring out his soul to God in heartfelt sorrow he was forgiven, even for those grave sins. Remember Jesus was not ashamed to be called, "son of David" even after what David had done. So what is stopping us from 'drinking deeply from the wellspring of his mercy'?

The prodigal could have stayed immersed in his misery, and miss out on the Father's forgiveness. I would say that the pain of Purgatory will be in the form of regrets at bypassing opportunities for repentance whilst in this present world.

However the elder son in the story, even though he stayed at home, doesn't come across in a very good light either. This part of the story was directed at the self-righteous Pharisees, who had little compassion for the weak and sinful. They even accused Jesus of cavorting with sinners. But Jesus reminded them that it is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Like the elder brother who outwardly kept all the rules, love of the law blinded the Pharisees to the law of love.

The father went out of his way to forgive his wayward son when he put his past behind him. This is in stark contrast to the disgruntled elder brother who couldn't find any room in his heart to welcome back his own flesh and blood. We don't want to be like him.

The father loved his elder son no less than the prodigal. He reassured him that everything he owned would eventually be his. What more could he have hoped for.

I suppose, come to think of it, there are at times a bit of the prodigal and his elder brother in all of us. The only thing which never changes is the Father's mercy which is freely given to those who humbly ask for it.