

## 24C

*There was a programme on the Telly recently about Mums and Dads who walk out on their family. One man split from his family while his three children were still quiet young. The interviewer asked him if he was sorry, and, now that they're older, would he now ask their forgiveness, to which he replied, "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 or persons which we need to ask forgiveness of as a prerequisite for our reconciliation with 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 don't want to know.

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 in the next life will be in the form of regrets at bypassing opportunities for repentance and receiving God's forgiveness while in this present world.

However the elder son in the story doesn't come across in a very good light - does he. This part of the story is added because the self-righteous Pharisees, represented by the disgruntled elder brother were hard-hearted and unforgiving. But Jesus reminded them that it is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick.

The lesson we can learn from the elder brother is that we

should put aside the idea of competing with God and earning His love. Earned love is a contradiction in terms. If we see everything in life as a gift from God, not as something we are entitled to, what a difference that would make to our spiritual and even temporal well-being. The father loved his elder son no less than the prodigal. He reassured him that everything he owned would eventually be his. What more did he want?

The lesson we can learn from his tear-away brother is that if we are humble enough to turn back to God, there is no sin which is beyond the scope of His forgiveness, howsoever great. Paul, Peter, and especially David are poignant examples of this.

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 forgiveness which is freely given to those humble enough to ask for it.