

Fr. Mark J. Seitz
March 17-18, 2007

IVLentC.07
St. Rita 5:30 p.m. Sat. & Sun.

The Third Son

That is a great story! Let's take a moment to retell it. Jesus is talking to the scribes and Pharisees, who believe they live very righteous lives and who question why Jesus spends so much time with worthless sinners. So Jesus tells this story: Remember how it starts?

"A man had *three* sons..." What's that look on your faces? I'll start again.

"A man had *three* sons..." Oh, you think there were two! I happen to know there were *three*. Well, in fact, the two Jesus is speaking about were adopted. Jesus is talking about the adopted ones, whom the father truly loved as his own. Let's try again.

"A man had *three* sons..." These three brothers lived a quiet happy life. One day, however, the youngest son decided that things were just too dull. He was tired of the same old, same old every day. He needed some action. He needed to see the world. He needed a woman...O.K. some women. He wanted to live like everyone else was living.

He knew how to finance the venture. His father was just an obstacle to everything he wanted to do. He wished his father were dead. "*Why wait for the old man to die*", he reasoned to himself, "*I'll just get my inheritance in advance.*" Away he went into the world. He drank, he partied, he cavorted with prostitutes, he thought of no one but himself. People talked not only about the exploits of the son, but also about the father who had raised such a ne'er-do-well.

His Father was brokenhearted. But what could he do? He couldn't force him back. The young man had his freedom. The father was loving and gentle, but he was also just. He knew he would be doing the youngest son no favor if he did not allow him to experience the consequences of his actions. If he simply wrote off everything the young man had done, he would become even more irresponsible.

The older brother among the two adopted sons had a decidedly different attitude than the Father. He was fed up with the behavior of his younger brother. All his life he had worked to be a good son. He fed and milked the cows, planted the crops, chopped the wood, took out the garbage. Why, he even cleaned out the old archives on the family computer! He did the chores while the young good-for-nothing goofed off. Since he was always angry and grumbling the older brother always had a frown on his face. When his brother left he said, "Good riddance!"

Then there was the brother, the one you never hear about. He saw the father's pain at the loss of his son. He too, while he never condoned his young brother's behavior, felt very sorrowful about his loss.

One day, after talking and carefully planning with his father, this son decided to set out looking for his brother. When he finally found him, his brother was nearly dead. He had exhausted all his inheritance. He was starving and covered with sores. That part about how he longed to eat the pig's food is all true. The son spoke with his wayward brother and assured him that his father would gladly take him back. The young son felt he was unworthy. All his many sins poured out of his mouth and mingled with his tears. He asked how his father could possibly forgive the dishonor he had brought. But his rescuer actually looked a lot like his dad. The tenderness and love in his eyes helped the young sinner to know that he would see the same mercy and forgiveness in his father's eyes as well.

There was still another problem. Even when the youngest brother decided he wanted to return more than anything in the world, he found there was no strength in his legs. There was no way he could make the journey unaided. His loving brother assured him that would not be a problem. It would be a long and arduous journey, but he was strong. His love for the father, and for his lost brother, would sustain him. He put the young man on his own back and up they went...to Calvary.