

November 26
Thanksgiving Day

All Saints Parish, Syracuse
Fr. Fred Daley

"Thanksgiving 2015"

In this familiar Scripture story of the prodigal son, this story of extravagant misbehavior and even more extravagant thanksgiving at reconciliation, I think most of us find our self, not in the reckless, self-centered younger son, but in the character of the elder son and perhaps that's where our reflection should begin: what was going on in the heart of the other son, that elder son, that prevented him from celebrating with his Dad and his brother?

To help us, let's consider another story:

Bill was a middle-aged man, happily married to a woman with whom he felt comfortable; he was pleased with his college teaching job in his respectable, if modest, salary. He lived in a friendly neighborhood where his children benefited from quality public schools.

Socially he was satisfied with his friendly colleagues and acquaintances, as well as several close friends. All in all, he felt quite content with his life --- that is, until he attended the 20th Reunion of his college graduating class.

Curiosity about how time and circumstances had treated his former classmates, brought him to an event on campus; and curiosity quickly turned into envy, jealousy and resentment when he discovered that many of his classmates had attained greater social, economic and professional status. Not only did they make more money and had what sounded like more exciting jobs, but also their children went to elite private schools and their wives seemed more educated and attractive than his.

The envious, jealous, resentful feelings stirred-up by his discovery destroyed his contentment and his inner peace and he returned home from the Reunion disgruntled, feeling inferior and like a failure. No longer happy with his spouse, he resented her for not being more like the wives of his classmates. He was now dissatisfied with his modest income and the monotony and lack of influence of his job. He harbored a secret animosity toward his successful friends, as well as a barely conscious hope that some setback would befall them.

In short: comparing himself others at a reunion created an onslaught of envy, resentment and jealousy and resulted in on-going psychic pain the tainted the way he viewed his whole life.

In the brief span of a weekend, resentment, envy and jealousy clouded his perceptions and blinded him to the good that he once enjoyed in his life.

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Sisters and brothers, the spiritual giants tell us that the best antidote to envy, resentment, and jealousy – that rob us of inner peace, that rob us of being at peace with others – is: *an attitude of gratitude, seeing the glass half-full rather than half-empty* ... the way to heal an envious heart is to replace it with a grateful heart! Regular prayer, self-reflection, solitude, silence in our lives remind us of the gracious generosity of God and awaken us to a sense of appreciation for the goodness that is already ours. We begin to recognize, appreciate and celebrate the gifts and graces bestowed upon us in our lives.

Sisters and brothers, when gratitude becomes our way of life, we make peace with ourselves and, consequently, with others; and we're one step closer to recognizing that everyone is a sister and brother rather than an object of competition and resentment, and we're able to celebrate the blessings all around us.

This coming weekend, we begin Advent, a time to step back and reflect on our life's journey as individuals, families, a nation and world, a time to wake-up and get our priorities ordered in a healthy way. To the extent that an attitude of gratitude is guiding our lives, we can pray with the psalmist:

*"It was you who created my inmost self and put me together in my mother's womb,
for all these mysteries, I thank you:
for the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your works, I thank you!"*

Amen