

Who has never made a mistake? Nobody can claim that in all honesty. Mistakes are not a sin. They are unintentional, caused by poor judgment, carelessness or insufficient knowledge. They may be the product of foolishness or selfishness. They become a “sin” when we willfully disregard biblical boundaries or contradict social norms.<sup>1</sup>

In today’s gospel from Luke, the reasoning behind the young man’s departure serves selfish interests: he wants his part of the inheritance and explore the world. What was meant to be fun and adventurous turned out to be unwise and quite catastrophic.

A party life isn’t inherently sinful – and Jesus nowhere in this parable mentions anything about anybody’s sin!<sup>2</sup> It’s foolishness, for sure – but the son doesn’t really repent, does he? He does not express regret. He is just desperate and hungry and journeys to the only place he bets he can get a square meal. His confession is an expedient. He is, however, clear that his rude action is sinful and an offense against God (v. 18).

The father in the story is constantly at the window praying and hoping to spot his son on the horizon, and when he does, he gets up and runs, upsetting the social expectations allowed to the offended party. Maybe, he has something to be forgiven for. Is he acknowledging his own

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<sup>1</sup> [The Difference Between Sin and Error – Catholic Stand](#)

<sup>2</sup> Contrary to the previous parables – see Luke 15:7 and 15:10

responsibility in the shattered relationship? Has his broken heart somewhat realized that he, too, has contributed to the devastating separation?

Repentance is not mentioned, is it? This parable does not end with Jesus' remark about heavenly joy at the repentance of a sinner found at the end of the two previous parables.<sup>3</sup>

There is movement towards reunification (whether caused by joy in the father or sheer desperation in the young son it doesn't matter). God uses the littlest crack in the armor to show mercy. God's presence is spotted in the father's compassion and his personal need for reconnection with his son, his need for mutual forgiveness. It is also spotted in the son's primal survival instinct and his search for a less harsh and more comfortable life.

This seems to be the pattern with God: creation and the renewal of life, the honoring and sanctification of life. The awareness of our needs, whether physical or emotional, our sensorial and intimate attraction to life, the emergence of new life and new possibilities, opens us to a greater, more sensical and more desirable reality and to what is available to us, abundantly, in the realm of God: grace, acceptance, forgiveness, reconciliation.

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 15:7 and 10

**Confession has nothing to do with getting ourselves forgiven.** Forgiveness (i. e., God's decision to always shower us with compassion and mercy, freely given) surrounds and follows us all our lives. Confession becomes natural and spontaneous when our eyes open; we confess only to wake ourselves up to what we already have. It's our response to the realization that we have been treated with compassion rather than justice all along.

Whom do you identify with in the story? The patient and understanding and perhaps naïve father who sits back and prayerfully hopes against evidence that his relationship with his son may heal? The self-righteous and judgmental older son who doesn't acknowledge his unearned privilege? The incredibly foolish and disrespectful younger son? They are all male figures, but gender has no bearing on difficult relationships (unless the point is to expose the difficult male ranking dynamics in a patriarchal society).

Again, who represents you in the story...today? Who reflects back to you your emotional and spiritual status at this present time? Relationships were broken and all three of them were at fault. If we keep God out of the equation and do not force God into taking on the father's role, we can consider the father of the parable as human as he can be with personal faults and relational failures. Did the father give in to his son's demands and let him go too quickly? Mistakes were made by all and all sinned through

pride towards one another. We don't know what precipitated the young man's decision or the family dynamic. It must be pretty hard, considering that the young man requested his part of the inheritance even before the father had died. Was his father as good as dead to him?

And what about the external environment? Supposing the family did not air their dirty laundry in public and people didn't know what was going on inside the house, were people shocked at seeing the younger son leaving and with so much wealth? Were they talking and making all sorts of wild guesses? And what judgments were being circulated when they saw the father skip for joy and running towards the wicked son returning home? Were neighbors having a field day gossiping about and expressing their self-righteous outrage? Were they even aware of what they were doing?

**All participants in the parable bore responsibility.** Is Jesus challenging his audience to seek social transformation through collective repentance and redemption?

“We all are sinners and fall short of the glory of God” St. Paul reminds us.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 3:23. See also Romans 3:10; 5:8.12 as well as 1 John 1:8 and 2 Corinthian 5, of course.

In Christ, God has taken the initiative to bring us, strangers and even enemies of God and of one another, together. Christ is the gravity center that reconciles conflicting differences and trains our eyes to see others with a new insight from God's perspective. Filled with the Spirit of Jesus and with gratitude, we learn to look at others with compassion and understanding. We see their joys and difficulties and let them become part of us and affect us. We create safe spaces where all are welcome, all are treated with respect and dignity, everyone's honor is protected, all are seen and heard, held and loved into healing.

**Christ is the reconciling factor.** If in him we find forgiveness, in him we cannot deny forgiveness to others. That would contradict his Spirit and message. So, if I am in Christ, I am a new creature; I do things in a new way. If I am in Christ, I let Christ take the lead in my interactions with the world: I let the mind of Christ consecrate my every choice and action. If I am in Christ, I do not see the other as separate from me, as "other," as a "stranger" to be suspicious of, as an "enemy" to defend myself from and possibly defeat.

So, we are messengers of this new reality, ambassadors for Christ, reconciled and reconcilers. May we taste and see the goodness of the Lord to us. May we be reconciled and made one, whole, healed.