

The Prodigal Son  
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Landings, Southeast Asia

## Homily Aid

### OVERVIEW

1. **The younger son leaves** in search of fulfillment, and we see that trend today even in our children. It tells us that mission fields have expanded and that an outreach to Catholics away is a ministry today for tomorrow.
2. The part where **“he came to himself”** where in our life challenges we find ourselves stripped of everything and left alone. God never abandons us. We return when we realize our true identity.
3. **The father actively scans the horizon. He runs.** The action of the father actively waiting in anticipation then running shows us that our church today must be more visible and ready to run out of its front gate.
4. **The embrace and dismissal of the son’s confession** is the realization of the opportunity to look at our personal history and find God in it. It does not change history but allows God’s presence to light it up.
5. The attitude of **the second son** examines our own attitude. We are part of the equation, part of an imperfect church but with attitude changes, we strive together as church ‘always returning’ towards perfection.
6. **Conclusion. The open-ended conclusion** to the parable not telling us if the second son entered the banquet challenges us to be more aware of who we are and to become missionary.

#### 1. The younger son leaves

**1. When the son requested that the father give him the share of property that was coming to him, the father honored his request and the son left home. How does this detail reflect God’s honoring of our free will and autonomy?**

God’s love is unconditional. Out of this love, God allows us the freedom to choose. Because of this true love, he always respects our choices. We situate this parable in our specific mission reaching out to away Catholics looking to return. In this said freedom of choice, God allows anyone to leave her the church and faith. As was in the parable, the father’s love accompanied the son in his decision to leave. When we decide to leave the church, God’s love accompanies us in the consequences of that choice to leave.

**2. In your experience as a leader what reasons do you observe that cause people to leave the Church?**

Most people simply drift away. They can be distracted or are too focused on career or family life. These days many marry outside the Catholic faith, which has been a contributing factor. These are changing lifestyles and they create a steady drift from being a church-centered life. They drift because they are searching for fulfilment. These new lifestyles, and values, can render God and Church irrelevant in their search for fulfilment.

These do not necessarily cause them to stop believing or even to hate God. Like the son in the parable, he did not hate his father but was focus on himself seeking fulfilment. And he believed he could find that elsewhere. This is quite similar to our situation with returning Catholics. Our *Landings* mission finds its form when we fully understand that this unconditional love, plus freedom of choice, mean we must be ready to welcome this person back. When God gives us this freedom to leave, he does not say to us “That’s your decision” and let us be but his love quietly accompany us through the consequences of that decision. We the Church must make this visible.

**3. Many parents grieve their children no longer practicing the Faith that the parents made part of their childhood development. What advice would you give these parents? (I’ve gotten this question many times at almost every conference where we had a booth.)**

This is also about looking for this fulfilment elsewhere. Sad and unhelpful as this may sound, we will eventually have to let them go. But we take lessons from this parable. In the parable, I am sure the father had a good conversation with the son, but he was not able to convince him to stay. We are all familiar with this as we all had that conversation.

In the parable, the father knew that holding the son back meant losing him immediately. Letting the son go, trusting God and the foundation of love that he had built with his son, he knew that one day his son will return, but we don’t know when. As parents, we must always build our faith foundation in our home, and in our families, when the children are young. This foundation will help our children in that journey, almost inevitable these days, that they will make to go outside of church.

**2. The Father actively scans the horizon. He runs.**

**1. When the father sees the son approaching, he is overwhelmed with compassion and joy, racing out to embrace him. What are some ways we can exemplify that eagerness to find the lost and bring them home, through Landings or in other ways?**

We must acknowledge that a community exists outside the institution, and obligation of our Sunday mass. This community exists outside the physical boundaries of a parish. In today's world, that number is ever-growing. The parable tells us that God the Father is actively waiting. There is also a trust in the work of the Holy Spirit that leads to a tangible anticipation. This calls for a mindset shift in both clergy and laity. Especially in developed, urban, well-informed societies, the need for evangelization would have shifted from those who do not know Christ to a re-evangelization to those who know but are struggling with that faith. These are people outside our pre-set boundaries of church. Our mission fields have not shifted but they have significantly expanded into areas we never focused on before. The numbers are growing, and it follows that the numbers returning will also grow in future. We must be ready in an active wait.

We must build and open new doors of mercy and compassion ready to welcome them back. We need to be at our front door, ready to dash out to journey-accompany those wanting to return.

## **2. How can we discover new ways to improve not just the visibility of the Church's open doors of welcome, but our own visual acuity, to be able to see the returnee on a distant hill and run toward them?**

We need to find the father in that parable in our inner self. It is not easy to love that way. It is a challenge to our own spiritual acuity to love without judgement and to love in a welcoming way reaching out to people we do not know but yet share this identity as a child of God.

This love is so deep, so real that it becomes a passion in all of us, clergy and laity, to propel us to run out of our front gates toward anyone with even the slightest desire to return, as was represented like the returning son appearing as a speck on the horizon.

It will be through us, and the working of the Holy Spirit that the smallest desires in returning Catholics grow to return them home into the Church.

## **3. What does the Church, like the Father, need to do to be more truly welcoming?**

The church is called to be pro-active, like the father in his wait. He scans the horizon in anticipation, an anticipation born out of trusting the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is already at work in the lives of people away from church, stirring them to return. The work of the Holy Spirit can only be fulfilled when the church is prepared.

The church must be prepared to run out of its front gates to meet and journey with returning Catholics outside the church, as the *Landings* mission go out to meet people where they are emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually in their belief (or unbelief). The mission recognizes their need for care and support. The

Church must run out of its front gate and meet people 'where they are' to begin that welcome back journey with them.

The church needs to understand this spirituality of the returning Catholic. It does not begin with information and knowledge to re-catechize. The methods of mission in this new focus are quite different.

### **3. The open-ended conclusion**

**1. Did we join in the banquet? Did the second son? Was he convinced by his father's expressions of joy at the brother's return, or did he still bear a grudge? Do we?**

The parable ends without telling us if the second son entered to join in the celebrations of one who was once lost but is now found. This mission of welcoming returning Catholics, in the methods of *Landings*, where we share faith stories and discover a personal God in each of them, can lead to many personal renewals. Embraced by the whole parish, it galvanizes our parish spirituality leading to parish renewals. Renewal in this sense, is part of the concept of "Always Returning".

As a parish, how do we respond? As individuals, as people of God, as laity, do we join the banquet to participate in this mission?