

## From Slavery to Freedom

Let me ask you to cast your minds back two weeks to the Gospel of the Second Sunday of Lent. Remember how Luke told us that in their conversation with Jesus, Moses and Elijah were discussing with him his exodus (passing) which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. The Exodus was the seminal event that brought about the very formation of the Jewish people as a nation. The Exodus was the journey the Jews undertook whereby they were delivered from slavery to freedom establishing them as a covenantal nation under God. In today's gospel Jesus tells of two sons who are also enslaved and of the exodus which they have to take to bring them to true community of freedom through the reconciling love of God. It is a sobering lesson for us.

At first glance these two sons seem so very different. The younger wants to grab his inheritance and enjoy his liberty and freedom, to express if you like, his individuality. The elder son seems content to stay at home and display those noble qualities of loyalty and fidelity by exercising a sort of autonomy which he hopes will eventually lead to an acknowledgement that the reins of authority will in due course be handed over to him. Both of them I imagine, in their different ways, had mapped out their future and they see it from the perspective of their own value. Freedom for them lies in the idea that their choices will be unrestricted, their responsibilities unfettered and their judgement unimpeachable. Of course such an outlook ignores the reality of just what the world is really like. Choice made on the basis of self-centredness ultimately leads to moral degradation which as a consequence begins to corrode the very freedom we so prize. Look at the two brothers again, and you can see how this degradation begins to eat away at the very essence of who they are.

The younger brother views his self worth as having so little value that he ends up hating himself and what he has become. The elder brother is so contorted with resentment that he sees himself as simply a slave of his father. The freedom which both so wish for and admirably cherish as something life enhancing and uplifting, has actually, because of their prodigal behaviour, become a type of enslavement, trapping them into a cycle of isolating and loathsome acts. The irony is that only the freedom exercised by their father is able to extricate them from the chains that bind them. Out of the three, it is the father who lives the life of freedom which the two sons desperately crave.

What is it that the father is able to provide which so liberates his sons? Our society has much to offer in terms of freedom, yet how often are we tied down by an unwillingness to be generous with our love. We place conditions and we set up restrictions on it which demean and distort what love ought to be. If we examine the father in the story we find that notwithstanding the way he has been treated by his sons, he remains totally and overwhelmingly generous with his love for them. The all embracing kiss which envelopes the younger brother, and the compassion in the words *all I have is yours* addressed to the elder one put into a stark perspective both what they themselves had thought about him, and how they had treated him. Yet just as importantly, the father responds without recrimination or reproach. Here is love that invites them to be as one, in unity of mind and purpose. It is a love that brings them back from slavery to freedom; it is the love that took Jesus to the cross so as to gain for us our liberation from sin.