

Paralysis of Pity

2 Samuel 13:31, 37–39, 14:21, 23–24

Embrace the Father's love this day.

How can you show this love to those in your care?

You are in David's chaotic household. King David's sins, in particular his neglect of his children, had disastrous personal and national results. This reminds us to cherish the gift of spiritual fatherhood.

Pray that the Lord draws you out of sloth to embrace the kingly mission he has given you. Pray for the grace of freedom and humility for all Exodus Men, just as they are praying for you.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord and Master of my life, spare me from the spirit of indifference, despair, lust for power, and idle chatter. Instead, bestow on me, your servant, the spirit of integrity, humility, patience, and love. Yes, O Lord and King, let me see my own sins and not judge my brothers and sisters; for you are blessed forever and ever. Amen.

A Reading from the Second Book of Samuel

Then the king arose, and tore his garments, and lay on the earth; and all his servants who were standing by tore their garments. And David mourned for his son day after day. So Absalom fled, and went to Geshur, and was there three years. And the spirit of the king longed to go forth to Absalom...

Then the king said to Joab, "Behold now, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom." So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. And the king said, "Let him dwell apart in his own house; he is not to come into my presence." So Absalom dwelt apart in his own house, and did not come into the king's presence.

Reflection

It has been five years since the rape of Tamar, and David has still taken no positive action as the father of his family. David is right in mourning the death of Amnon and in mourning the further loss of Absalom who has fled for three years. Still, something seems a bit over the top with David's grief. He keeps on mourning day after day after day, but there is no mention of his ongoing care for his kingdom, his wives, or his remaining children. It takes a lot to get him finally to send for Absalom to come home. Once Absalom is home, he bars him from coming into his presence.

Perhaps David is not mourning the loss of Amnon as much as he is wallowing in self-pity. Self-pity is one of the last areas of sinfulness to be purged from the hearts of good people. It is really a subtle form of pride. Maybe the joyful songs he once played on the lyre for King Saul have long since been driven from his heart. Maybe the cheers he heard when he slew Goliath are now but a distant hum in his memory. The David, who had once danced

before the ark, now seems impotent, lethargic, and depressed. He is getting older, to be sure, and he is not the “rock star” that he used to be. Surely, Absalom is more cunning, more ambitious, and better looking. Maybe David thinks that he deserves his misfortunes because of his sins. Or maybe David thinks his sins of neglect are justified by his misfortunes.

In spite of all this, and in spite of his sins, David is still the Lord’s anointed, the man after God’s own heart. David has lost sight of this. He fails to bear witness to God’s mercy and to the hope it brings because he doubts God’s love for him. He seems to have fixed his eyes on himself and on his losses rather than on the Lord.

Any of us can fall into this kind of sadness that springs from disordered self-love. Any of us can feel sorrier for ourselves than we have ever felt sorry for sin. Even when we feel sorry for sin, we are often sorrier that we got caught. We think we should have known better or should have been stronger. The devil loves to fish in these murky waters of our sadness. He loves to tell us hurtful lies that obscure God’s goodness and mercy. The truth is that we are powerless without grace. As Jesus said, “apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). By contrast, as St. Paul reminds us, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

How does self-pity weaken your spiritual fatherhood? How does the devil take your eyes off of Jesus to focus on your faults and failures? Do you believe that you are a man after God’s heart? If David, an adulterous murderer, can be God’s man, why can’t you, configured to Christ by Baptism, be his beloved?

Now place yourself before God, and converse with him.

Week 7 Action Items

Meditate on your vocation.

Schedule fraternity time.

Reflect on your summer schedule.

Mark Reading as Complete