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Reflections on the Parable of the Prodigal Son

Christ's parable of the Prodigal Son was told to illustrate the rejoicing that takes place in Heaven over one sinner who repents. In the parable the Prodigal Son himself becomes the subject of an argument between the father and the faithful son, and the sentiments of the Prodigal are passed over. He is left somewhat in the background of the discussion.

But what must have been his feelings? He had wasted his inheritance in riotous living; his brother, more graphically, accused him of swallowing up his patrimony in the company of harlots; he had been reduced to trudging in the muck of a pig sty, taking care of the swine, drooling over the corn husks on which the beasts satisfied their hunger. Hunger drove him back to his father's house to ask forgiveness so that he might get a job there as a servant. But the father, overjoyed at his return, welcomed him back not as a servant, but as a son.

"...the father gave orders to his servants, bring out the best robe, and clothe him in it; put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. Then bring out the calf that has been fattened, and kill it; let us eat, and make merry; for my son here was dead, and has come to life again, was lost, and is found."

Can we imagine that once the banquet was over, once his hunger was satisfied, he again left his father's house and went back to his swine? Can we imagine that after a time he became bored with his father's attentions and affection, that he rebelled against the obligations that arose from his being a son in his father's household?

To suggest the purpose of bringing up this parable, words of St. Paul to the Romans are applicable.

We are sons in the household, not servants: "It is the spirit of adoption that makes us cry out, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself thus assures our spirit, that we are children of God; and if we are children, then we are His heirs too; heirs to God, sharing the inheritance of Christ.."

We have been welcomed by the Father, clothed in the new robe of sanctifying grace: "You know well enough that we who were taken up in Christ by baptism, have been taken up, all of us, into His death. In our baptism, we have been buried with Him, died like Him, that so, just as Christ was raised up from the dead, we too must live and move in a new kind of existence..."

Once welcomed back, raised up, it is unthinkable that we revert to our former condition: "...the death He [Christ] died was a death, once for all, to sin; the life He now lives is a life that looks towards God. And you, too, must think of yourselves as dead to sin, and alive with a life that looks towards God, through Christ Jesus our Lord."