



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

**CATECHESIS PREPARED BY THE HOLY FATHER
FOR THE GENERAL AUDIENCE OF 16 APRIL 2025**

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[Multimedia]

**Cycle of Catechesis – Jubilee 2025. Jesus Christ our Hope. II. The life of Jesus. The encounters 5.
*The merciful father. He was lost and has been found (Lk 15:32)***

Dear brothers and sisters,

After reflecting on Jesus' encounters with some figures from the Gospel, I would like to pause, starting with this catechesis, on some parables. As we know, they are stories that draw on images and situations from everyday reality. That is why they also touch our lives. They provoke us. And they ask us to take a position: where am I in this story?

Let us begin with the most famous parable, the one that we perhaps all remember from when we were children: the parable of the father and the two sons (Lk 15:1-3, 11-32). In this we find the heart of the Gospel of Jesus, namely God's mercy.

The evangelist Luke says that Jesus tells this parable for the pharisees and the scribes, who lamented that He ate with sinners. This is why it could be said that it is a parable addressed to those who are lost, but do not know it, and judge others.

The Gospel is intended to give us a message of hope, because it tells us that wherever we are lost, and however we are lost, God always comes looking for us! Perhaps we have gone astray like a sheep, which has wandered off the path to graze, or fallen behind due to fatigue (cf. Lk 15:4-7). Or maybe we have been lost like a coin, which has perhaps fallen on the ground and can no

longer be found, or someone has put it somewhere and cannot remember where. Or maybe we are lost like the two sons of this father: the youngest because he got tired of being in a relationship that he felt was too demanding; but the eldest is also lost, because it is not enough to stay at home if there is pride and resentment in his heart.

Love is always a commitment, there is always something that we must lose in order to go towards the other. But the younger son in the parable thinks only of himself, as happens in certain phases of childhood and adolescence. In reality, we also see around us many adults who are like this, who are unable to maintain a relationship because they are selfish. They delude themselves that they will find themselves and instead they lose themselves, because only when we live for someone do we truly live.

This younger son, like all of us, hungers for affection, he wants to be loved. But love is a precious gift; it must be treated with care. Instead, he squanders it, he disregards it, he does not respect himself. He realizes this in times of famine, when no-one cares for him. The risk is that in those moments we beg for affection and attach ourselves to the first master we chance upon.

It is these experiences that give rise within us to the distorted belief that we can only be in a relationship as servants, as if we had to atone for a guilt or as if true love could not exist. Indeed, the younger son, when he hits rock bottom, thinks he will go back to his father's house to pick up a few crumbs of affection from the ground.

Only those who truly love us can free us from this false view of love. In the relationship with God, we have precisely this experience. The great painter Rembrandt, in a famous painting, beautifully depicted the return of the prodigal son. Two details in particular strike me: the young man's head is shaven, like that of a penitent, but it also looks like the head of a child, because this son is being born again. And then the father's hands: one male and the other female, to describe the strength and tenderness in the embrace of forgiveness.

But it is the eldest son who represents those for whom the parable is told: he is the son who always stayed at home with his father, yet was distant from him, distant in heart. This son may have wanted to leave too, but out of fear or duty he stayed there, in that relationship. When you adapt unwillingly, however, you begin to harbour anger within you, and sooner or later this anger explodes. Paradoxically, it is precisely the eldest son who in the end risks being left out, because he does not share his father's joy.

The father goes towards him too. He does not reproach him or call him to duty. He wants only that he feels his love. He invites him to enter and to leave the door open. That door remains open for us too. Indeed, this is the reason for hope: we are able to hope because we know that the Father is waiting for us, He sees us from afar, and He always leaves the door open.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask ourselves, then, where we are in this wonderful tale. And let us ask God the Father for the grace that we too can find our way back home.

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