

Readings: [Third Sunday of Advent | USCCB](#)

**Day 4, June 6, 2016, 2<sup>nd</sup> hour of prayer, 1:10pm.**

**Scripture:** Luke 15:11-32, the prodigal son.

**Grace to pray for:** The grace to feel shame and sorrow for my inner lies and attitudes that prevent me from staying in God's grace.

**Location:** Retreat dorm room, sitting on a chair, simple desk in front of me with only the bible, a crucifix, and lit tea light.

**Preliminary thoughts:**

I really want to enter this hour of prayer fully open, transparent. I am not thrilled about what I am being asked to do: to think about my sins... I am entering this moment of prayer with honesty but with nervous hesitation. I feel in my heart the desire to give Jesus permission to reveal any hidden wounds or sins in my life, any lies that have infiltrated my soul, which is a good thing, but frightening because so far on this retreat any time I give him permission to do something he does it! And I guess part of me doesn't want to come to admit to things I've perhaps been justifying... I am afraid of what I might find. Nevertheless, I am asking him to heal and make me new. I am also curious, if Jesus would pray for me, what would his prayer be? With this I entered into prayer.

**Journal entry after prayer:**

After reading this very familiar scripture passage, I started doing a deep examination of conscience, but I was getting mentally exhausted from thinking and thinking about my sins. I felt like I have done a good

deal of healing in my life of big things, plenty of confessions, other retreats where I have healed experiences of my upbringing... so I was really trying to find something new but not much was coming up other than the same.

Then, the Lord took me to a particular memory, a night when I was round 22 years old. That day I wanted to go out but none of my friends were available, so I decided to out on my own looking for a good time. I remember getting home, around 2am and walking into my room, ringing in the ears, not in all my senses, taking off my clothes and throwing it on the floor, adding to the growing pile, and laying clotheless in the dark, feeling lonely and foolish since I meet no one that night, no one seemed to notice me.

After a while in this memory and experiencing those feeling all over again, I looked over to the side and there I saw Jesus sitting next to me.

“How do you feel?” he asked.

To me he was being sarcastic, I thought it was pretty evident, but he asked so I began to tell him exactly how I felt, mostly complaining about life. After a bit, got up and started to pick up my clothes from the floor.

“what are you doing?” I asked

“cleaning up” he replied.

“can I help”

“No, this I want to do for you, you just lay there and keep talking, keep me company”

Honestly I was glad he told me not to help him.

“why did you bring me back here, to this memory, to this room?” I asked.

Looking at the tag of the shirts he said;

“these are nice, very expensive”

“yeah, I like good quality...”

“sure, quality is good when can actually afford it... I wont ask about your credit cards... why do you have so much? How does wearing these make you feel?”

“important, like people see me, like I am successful and happy”

“did people see that tonight? Anyone notice your joy and success?”

He had me...

“well no, I’m feeling pretty lonely actually”

“but people wouldn’t know that”

“that’s the idea:

“so you don’t want people to know you?”

“of course I do, I just don’t think anyone cares about this struggle, so it’s best to just show your best self”

“look at you, you have nothing on, it is all on the floor... and who of your friends are here? Maybe they would be if they knew the whole you... but I am here, I like getting to know you. My prayer for you is that you love yourself like I love you, and that you are not afraid to let others love you for who you are as well.”

A sense joy came over me as I heard that. I wonder if the prodigal son felt what I was experiencing, I sure hope so... it was not shame, it was not guilt, it was joy, a mutual and shared joy.

He continued cleaning the room as we talk through the night, we had many other conversations I will write about separately, but for now I feel like I have found my best friend, the kind of friend who loves you, the whole you, even your dirty laundry, and helps you fold it.

**10:55pm, end of fourth hour of prayer.**

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Joy... most of us, hopefully all of us, are attracted to joy. We enjoy being around people who make us laugh, gives us a present, dedicates a song to us... We feel joy when we ourselves are able to bring a smile on someone's face, when **someone comes to us**, seeks our presence, enjoys being around us. We might be having the worst of days, but an experience of joy, even if it is brief, can make us forget the pain. Not to mention smiles are contagious, even if for the moment, most of them are with the eyes.

When it comes to our lives of faith, how do you experience joy? Maybe it is the fact that God loves you unconditionally. Maybe is in knowing that your sins are forgiven. Maybe it was a powerful experience of God's grace in your life, all which are good reasons, and that that is how we typically think about joy, in how we feel about the goodness of God. But scripture gives us another way of looking at it... we are told to rejoice because of the joy that God finds in us. You make God happy.

Zephaniah told a people suffering from the result of their sin to not be discouraged because the LORD their God was in their midst and would **rejoice over** them with gladness and would sing joyfully because of them. **It is God who sings, for you.**

The psalmist and St Paul exhorts people to cry out with joy and gladness because God's presence in their midst. **It is God who comes to you.**

Like the father in the prodigal son story, we find joy in seeing with what joy God sees us, notices us, runs towards us, just as we are. Is that not what Christmas is about? God coming to us. What about you, personally, makes God smile? What about you, personally, made the Christmas event, God coming to us in human flesh, happen? It happened, and it happened because of how much joy God has for you, despite your sin.

Notice who in the gospel is drawn to the message of John the Baptist: tax collectors and soldiers, people considered to be the epidemic of corruption and sin, who would often take advantage of people and bring them not joy but misery. What does John say to them?

He doesn't tell them to stop being tax collectors, he doesn't tell them to stop being soldiers, he tells them to be who they are **for the right reason...** if you are a tax collector, then do so responsibly so people can experience financial peace. If you are a soldier, then do so responsibly so people can experience social peace. Meaning, God finds joy in us when we act with justice, charity, honesty, when we are like Christ, and all of us have the capacity to do so, even when we are not, which is why God runs to us in our sin, because he sees this good in me and you in a way no other can.

At 22 I experienced one of the darkest moments in my own life of struggling between sin and grace, and it took me years to understand just how Jesus was present in that dark moment of my life. I experienced joy

in realizing Jesus was not afraid of my mess, but ran to it, cleaned my room, and I was taken back with what care and joy he did so.

As we get closer to remembering that Christmas event, if you haven't already done so, take time to let God rejoice over you by letting Jesus clean up your dirty laundry. Take time to do a good examination of conscience and make a good confession... I know having to face your sins is not the most joyful thing in the world to do, at least not at first, but when you realize who is there next to you seeing beyond all that, you realize there is nothing to fear.

On Thursday at 6:30pm we will convert this space into a giant laundromat in our penance service, and along with 8 other priests, we would be happy to rejoice with you as we hear your confession. Consider being here for that.

Let's end with prayer:

*Jesus, I anticipate the celebration of your birth, let these remaining weeks of advent increase in me the awareness of just how much you rejoice over me. Give me the grace of a good examination of conscience, I give you permission to reveal to me in the next few days, anything that might keep me from your joy for me.*

***Amen.***

+ Fr. Carlos