How Has the Fall Affected Me?

Catechetical Institute

Nov. 2014, C. Smith
 **Part 1: Meditation on Luke 15:11-32—A Parable of Mercy**

1. In God’s plan of mercy he searches for us in our unavailability to His love, lifts us from our misery, and raises us to communion with him.

The effects of original sin—our “original wound” (Groeschel)—incline us to **sin** which “sets itself against God’s love for us and turns our hearts away from it” (CCC 1850). The victory of Christ over sin and death gives us hope that in His reconciling us to Himself our sin and brokenness can become “stepping stones” rather than “stumbling blocks” to deeper intimacy with God.

Rembrandt, The Return of the Prodigal (ca. 1668/9).

1. The Two Sons

The Prodigal—broke his filial relationship to (his father) God in order to situate his life outside of obedience to him (JPII’s description of sin, from Reconciliation and Penance, 18).

The Elder Son—while maintaining the guise of obedience also rejects his father in the depths of his heart.

1. Our own separation from God; original sin and some of its **effects**
2. Our image of God/image of ourselves is distorted due to our **darkened intellect**

Our image of God (who transcends human fatherhood and motherhood) and our self-knowledge necessitate on-going purification (CCC 42, 239, 2779).

Our true identity is only found in God: “I knit you in secret” (Ps. 139:13), “You are my beloved son/daughter” through Baptism (Lk. 3:22); “I am with you always and everything I have is yours” (Lk. 15:31)

Acknowledging our brokenness, our sinfulness and need for God’s mercy is essential for true self-knowledge.

1. Interior struggle on account of our **weakened will**--“I do not understand what I do…I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep doing” (Rom. 7:15, 19).

Each of us has been made to worship, to find happiness and meaning for our lives in God but instead we become distracted and enamored by other things. We give ourselves to a disordered seeking of our ultimate end in things of this world; God’s gifts are sought and treasured as God. “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be” (Mt.:21). Where is your heart?

Augustine (Confessions, 10.27): “Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created.  You were with me, but I was not with you. “

1. **Disordered emotions**-- Fear and anxiety (as well as other emotions such as anger and resentment) keep us isolated from God and others, and can become so powerful as to enslave us.

“Take, Lord, receive\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_” (St. Ignatius of Loyola)

1. Impact on all **our relationships---** A break with the father entails separation from the brother (e.g. the Prodigal), and a break with the brother separates one from the father (the Elder Son).

 “What a wretched man I am! Who can rescue me from this body under the power of death?” (Rom. 7:24).

1. God’s mercy: Divine mercy is a “love more powerful than sin, stronger than death. When we realize that God’s love for us does not cease in the face of our sin or recoil before our offenses, but becomes even more attentive and generous…then we exclaim in gratitude: ‘Yes, the Lord is rich in mercy, and even: **‘The Lord is mercy’**”(JPII, Reconciliation and Penance, 18).

Come, without paying and without cost…” (Is. 55:1).

“You are with me always, and everything I have is yours!” (Lk. 15:31)

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**Meditation:**

**Read** the story with prayerful attention (not as one might casually skim the newspaper, but like one who has received a letter from a dear friend)

 **Meditate—**Place yourself in the story. Whose perspective will you take? The Prodigal? Elder son? Father? Curious bystander?

Note—what strikes you? What catches your attention? What questions are raised? What happens to you in/through the story? What emotions arise? (fear, sorrow, joy, etc.)
Which part of your meditation stood out to you? Where did the story of these 2 sons and their father intersect with yours? What is God saying to you? Asking of you?

**Pray**—How do you want to respond to God? Be as transparent as possible. If this is difficult, ask God to help you.
Some questions you might want to consider: Answer Christ’s query, “Who do you say that I am?”  and ask Him in return, “Who do you say that I am?”  What aspects of your understanding of God need adjusting, healing, purification? How does what you think of yourself filter God’s love?  What keeps you from believing the Father’s words, “You are with me always, and everything I have is yours”?  Where do you need to reconcile with God?/with others?  To what have you turned to find happiness, meaning for life?  How has it failed you?  What areas of life are difficult to place in God’s hands?  What are you afraid the Lord might do/ask of you? Pray, “Take, Lord, receive…” filling in what you’d like to give to the Lord.  What in your life may be God’s way of helping you to “come to your senses?” What keeps you from believing the wideness of God’s mercy is for you? **Lk. 15:11-32**

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, `Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.'

And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself he said, `How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants."' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

 And the son said to him, `Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, `Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry.

Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, `Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in.

His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' And he said to him,

`Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'

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 **Part 2: Drinking from the Well of God’s Mercy: How can we live in the love that is greater than our weakness and sin?**

1. The Examen Prayer

A. **Give thanks:** “I note the gifts that God’s love has given me this day and I give thanks to God for them.”

B. **Prayer for enlightenment:** “I ask God for an insight and a strength that will make this examen a work of grace, fruitful beyond my human capacity alone”

C. **The review:** “With my God, I review the day. I look for the stirrings of my heart and the thoughts that God has given me this day. I look also for those that have not been of God. I review my choices in response to both, and throughout the day in general.”

D. To **ask for forgiveness:** “I ask for the healing touch of the forgiving God who, with love and respect for me, removes my heart’s burdens.”

E. **Renewal:** “I look to the following day and, with God, plan concretely how to live it in accord with God’s loving desire for my life

(St. Ignatius of Loyola; paraphrased from Timothy Gallagher, The Examen Prayer, p. 25; see also Consciousness Examen, by George Aschenbrenner)

1. The Sacrament of Reconciliation ‘Brings about a true “**spiritual resurrection**,” a restoration of the dignity and blessing of the life of the children of God, of which the most precious is friendship with God’ (CCC, 1468).
2. **Reconciliation with the Lord is a response of grace; mutual joy is its fruit!**

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**PSALM 51**3 Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your merciful love;
in your abundant compassion blot out my transgressions.

4 Thoroughly wash away my guilt;
and from my sin cleanse me.

5 For I know my transgressions;
my sin is always before me.

6 Against you, you alone have I sinned;
I have done what is evil in your eyes

9 Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

10 You will let me hear gladness and joy;
the bones you have crushed will rejoice.

14 Restore to me the gladness of your salvation;
uphold me with a willing spirit.

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 **For Further Reading:**

Aschenbrenner, George. Consciousness Examen.

Gallagher, Timothy. The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today.

Groeschel, Benedict. Stumbling Blocks or Stepping Stones: Spiritual Answers to Psychological Questions.

John Paul II. Reconciliation and Penance.

Nouwen, Henri. The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming.

Autobiographical accounts of 2 saints who write powerfully about God’s mercy in their lives:

St. Augustine. Confessions (especially his conversion in Bk. 8).

St. Therese of Lisieux. Story of a Soul.