

That evening as the chaplain on his rounds opened the door of room 42 he was met by Miss Nolan. It was plain from her gracious smile that her patient's condition was improved. Mrs. Culbert extended a hand to him as he walked in. "Father," she began, her face radiating a joy, "the Lord has been good to me today. He has granted me two great favors. Here she stopped and the eyes of the visitor searched her questioning. He had heard of only one of them. "Sit down, Father," she continued. "I have something to tell you."

"My attraction for the Catholic religion goes back many years. But it must remind you in the first place that I am a child of a mixed marriage. I understand now the wisdom of the Catholic Church in opposing such unions. My father was a Protestant and my mother a Catholic. I had one brother older than myself and he was reared in mother's religion. But Dad had his way with me and so I grew up a Baptist. We were in comfortable circumstances, the folks had a farm in Kent county and when I was about ten years of age both my parents were suddenly killed in a railway accident. That kept me at home over my life. After that I was sent away to make my home with father's people, all Protestants, and my brother went out to California with distant relatives of my mother. How well I remember the day the poor boy left. I went around to the back of the house and cried my eyes out. He managed to keep in touch with me for a while but then his letters stopped coming. I could not guess the reason but somehow I suspected that my relatives had a hand in the new turn of events. They took exception to all things Catholic and had forbidden me to communicate with him. My worst imaginings were confirmed one day when I found the remains of one of his letters on the ash heap. I pieced it together as best I could and made out enough to know that my brother was well and about to graduate from college. I answered it secretly but never received an answer."

"About this time, Father, I was sent away to boarding school and while there I was obliged to undergo an operation. I became a patient at St. Mary's hospital in Grenston. That was considered the best place in the State and besides there was a noted surgeon there, now dead. I have forgotten his name. It was there that my real love for the Catholic Church began. The kindness of everyone, I have never forgotten. It made a great change in my feelings. I would be more correct to say that they were revolutionized. In my own youthful way I proceeded to reason that a religion that could produce so much good must be of a superior brand. The self-sacrifice of the nuns, especially, impressed me deeply. I had never seen anything like that before, such absolute forgetfulness of self for the sake of a cause. It set me thinking, I asked my Father. My own religion struck me as cold and barren alongside this warmth of charity. It was not strange, was it, that before I was discharged I longed to become a Catholic."

"I forgot to mention, Father, that I had a singular experience before I underwent the operation, an experience which helped pave the way for my changed attitude toward all things Catholic. It happened in the operating room. There was a crucifix on the wall the same as there is here, I suppose, and as the intern placed the ether-cap over my nostrils that crucifix seemed to step down from the wall and come toward me with outstretched arms. It was wonderful, wonderful and a source of great consolation to me ever since. I certainly would have carried out my intentions to become a Catholic were it not for an early and in some ways an unfortunate marriage. My husband was not a Catholic and not at all friendly to the Church. Then with the cares of a growing family you can imagine how much time I had to carry on my resolution. But I cultivated Catholic friends, read Catholic books, and became acquainted with Catholic practices. But there were two things that I have always prayed for; my own reception into the Church and the discovery of my long lost brother. I had never been able to secure the least trace of him but God has been good to me and."

"Father Sullivan, you are wanted down the corridor."

The chaplain excusing himself for a moment arose quickly and stepped out. After he had closed the door the nurse informed him that old Father Ramsdell had just suffered a weak spell and wanted to speak to him. That effort this morning, I'm afraid was too much for him," she added.

The young priest's trained eye told him that the old pioneer was indeed sick, sick unto death. There was no time to spare. He heard his confession and then administered the Last Rites. When he had finished the white-haired ambassador of Christ raised his trembling hand slightly as if to impart a blessing to his conferee. His breathing was labored, his voice feeble, and the word slow.

"She is all I have, Father, and God gave her back to me today before he called me to Himself. She—she is—she is my long lost sister. Do what you can for her when I am gone."

In a few minutes the dying man lapsed into unconsciousness. His own sister was his last convert.—The Eternal Light.

THE STORY OF CHRIST

BY GIOVANNI PAPINI  
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But if the young man had brought himself to the point of refusing the name of son, the old man never felt himself more father than at this moment; he seemed to become a father for a second time, and without even answering, with his eyes still clouded and soft, but with the ringing voice of his best days, he called to the servants:

"Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet."

The son of the master should not return home wretchedly dressed like a beggar. The finest garment should be given him, new shoes, a ring on his finger, and the servants must wait on him because he, too, is a master.

"And bring hither the fatted calf; and kill it, and let us eat and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

The fatted calf was kept in reserve for great feast days; but what festival can be greater for me than this one? I had wept for my son as dead and here he is alive with me. I had lost him in the world and the world has delivered him back to me. He was far away and now is with me, he was a beggar at the doors of strange houses, and now is master in his own house; he was famished and now he shall be served with a banquet at his own table.

And the servants obeyed him and the calf was killed, skinned, cut up and put to cook. The oldest wine was taken from the wine-cellar, and the finest room was prepared for the dinner in celebration of the return. Servants went to call his father's friends and others went to summon musicians, that there should be music. And when everything was ready, when the son had been bathed, and his father had kissed him many times more—almost as if to assure himself with his lips that his true son was there with him and it was not the vision of a dream—they commenced the banquet, the wines were mixed and the musicians accompanied the songs of joy.

The older son was in the field, working, and in the evening when he came back and was near to the house he heard shouts and stampings and clapping of hands, and the footsteps of dancers. And he could not understand. "Whatever can have happened? Perhaps my father has gone crazy or perhaps a wedding procession has arrived unexpectedly at our house."

Disliking noise and new faces, he would not enter and see for himself what it was. But he called to a boy coming out of the house and asked him what all that clatter was.

"Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound."

These words were like a thrust at his heart. He turned pale, not with pleasure, but with rage and jealousy. The old envy boiled up inside. It seemed to him that he had all the right on his side, and he would not go into the house, but stayed outside, angry.

Then his father went out and entreated him: "Come, for your brother has come back and has asked after you, and will be glad to see you, and we will feast together."

But the serious-minded young man could not contain himself, and for the first time in his life ventured to reproach his father to his face.

"Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

With these few words he discloses all the ignominy of his soul hidden until then under the Pharisaical cloak of good behavior. He reproaches his father with his own obedience, he reproaches him with his avarice: "You have never given me even a kid"—and he reproaches him, he, a loveless son, for being a too-loving father. "This thy son," he does not say, "brother." His father may recognize him as son, but he will not recognize him as brother. "He hath devoured thy living with harlots. Money that was not his, with women that were not his while I stayed with thee sweating on thy fields with no recompense."

But his father pardoned this son, as he did the other son, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

The father is sure that these words will be enough to silence the other. "He was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found. What other reasons can be needed, and what other reasons can be better than these—grant that he has done what he has done, that he has spent my money on women; he has dissipated as much as he could; he left

me without a greeting; he left me to weep. He could have done worse than that and still would have been my son. He could have stolen on the streets, could have murdered the guiltless, he could have offended me even more, but I never could forget that he is my son, my own blood. He was gone and has returned, was disappeared and has reappeared, was lost and is found, was dead and is alive again. This is enough for me and to celebrate this miracle a fatted calf seems little to me. Thou hast never left me, I always enjoyed thee, all my kids are thine if thou askest for them; thou hast eaten every day at my table; but he was gone for so many days and weeks and months! I saw him only in my dreams; he has not eaten a single piece of bread with me in all that time. He is not the right to triumph at least this day?"

Jesus stopped here. He did not go on with His story. There was no need of that, the meaning of the parable is clear with no additions. But no story—after that of Joseph—that ever came from human lips is more beautiful than this one or ever touched more deeply the hearts of men. Interpreters are free to comment and explain, that the prodigal son is the new man purified by the experience of grief, and the older son, the Pharisee who observes the old law but does not know love. Or else that the older son is the Jewish people who do not understand the love of the Father welcoming the pagan, although he had wallowed in the foul loves of paganism and had lived in the company of sinners.

Jesus was no maker of riddles. He Himself says expressly that the meaning of this and similar parables is: "More joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over all the righteous who vaunt themselves in their false righteousness; than for all the pure who are proud of their external purity; than for all the zealous who hide the aridity of their hearts by their apparent respect for the law."

The truly righteous will be received in the Kingdom, but no one ever doubted them, they have made no one tremble and suffer and there is no need to rejoice; but for him who has been near perdition, who has gone through deep sufferings and made himself a new soul, to overcome his beatitude, who merits his place in the Kingdom the more because he has had to deny all his past to obtain it, for him songs of triumph shall arise.

"What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost."

Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and ponder diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.'"

And what is a sheep compared to a son returned to life, to a man saved? And of what value is a piece of silver compared to one astray, who finds himself again?

THE PARABLES OF SIN

But forgiveness creates an obligation for which there are no exceptions allowed. Love is a fire which goes out if it does not kindle others. Thou hast burned with joy; kindle him who comes near you if thou wilt not become like stone, smoky but cold. He who has received must give; it is better to give much, but it is essential to give part at least.

A king one day wanted a reckoning with his servants and one by one he called them before him. Among the first was one who owed him ten thousand talents, but as he had not anything to pay this, the king commanded that he should be sold and his wife and his children and all that he had, in payment of a part of the debt. The servant in despair threw himself at the feet of a king. He seemed a mere bundle of garments crying out sobs and promises. "Have patience with me, wait a little longer and I will pay you all, but do not have my wife and my children separated from me, sent away like cattle, no one knows where."

The king was moved with compassion—he also had little children—and he sent him away free and forgave him that great debt. The servant went out and seemed another man; but his heart, even after so much mercy shown to him, was the same as before. And he met one of his fellow-servants who owed him a hundred pence, a small thing compared with ten thousand talents, and he sprang on him and took him by the throat. "Pay me what thou owest and at once, or I will have thee bound by the guards." The unlucky man assaulted in this way did what his persecutor had done a little while before in the presence of the king. He fell down at his feet and besought him and wept and swore that he would pay him in a few days and kissed the hem of his garment, and recalled to him their old comradeship and begged him to wait in the name of the children who were waiting for him in his home.

But the oaf, who was a servant and not a king, had no compassion. He took his debtor by the arm and led him cast-into prison. The news spread abroad among the other servants of the palace. They were full of compassion, and it came quickly to the ears of the king, who called that pitiless man and delivered him to the tormentors: "I forgave you that great debt, shouldst thou not have had compassion on thy brother, for his debt was so much smaller? I had pity on thee, oughtest thou not to have had pity on him?"

Sinners when they recognize the evil which is in their hearts and abjure it with true humility are nearer to the Kingdom than pious men who daub themselves with the praise of their own piety.

Two men went into the temple to pray: the one a Pharisee, the other a Publican. The Pharisee, with his phylacteries hanging upon his forehead and on his left arm, with the long, glittering fringes on his cloak, erect like a man who feels himself in his own house, prayed thus: "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."

But the Publican did not have the courage even to lift his eyes and seemed ashamed to appear before his Lord. He sighed and smote on his breast and said only these words: "God be merciful to me a sinner."

"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

A lawyer asked Jesus who is one's neighbor, and Jesus told this story: "A man, a Jew went down from Jerusalem to Jericho through the mountain passes. Thieves fell upon him, and after they had wounded him and taken away his clothes, they left him upon the road half dead. A priest passed that way, one of those who go to all the festivals and meetings, and boast that they know the will of God from beginning to end. He saw the unfortunate man stretched out but he did not stop, and to avoid touching something unclean he passed by on the other side of the road. A little after came a Levite. He also was among the most accredited of the zealous, knew every detail of all the holy ceremonies, and seemed more than a sacristan, seemed one of the masters of the Temple. He looked at the bloody body and went on his way. And finally came a Samaritan. To the Jews the Samaritans were faithless, traitors, only slightly less detestable than the Gentiles, they left him upon the road half dead. A priest passed that way, one of those who go to all the festivals and meetings, and boast that they know the will of God from beginning to end. He saw the unfortunate man stretched out and what seemed uncircumcized, were a Jew or a Samaritan. He came up close to him, and seeing him in such an evil pass, he was quickly moved to pity, took down his flasks from his saddle and poured upon his wounds a little oil, a little wine, he bound them up as well as he could with a handkerchief, put the stranger across his ass and brought him to an inn, had him put to bed, tried to restore him, giving him something hot to drink, and did not leave him until he saw him come to himself and able to speak and eat. The next day he called the host apart and gave him two pence: 'Take care of him, do the best thou canst and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.'

"The neighbor, then, is he who suffers, he who needs help, whoever he is, of whatever nation or religion he may be; even thine enemy, if he needs thee, even if he does not ask help, is the first of thy neighbors."

Charity is the most valid title for admission to the Kingdom. The wealthy glutton knew this, he who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. At the gate of his palace there was Lazarus, a poor man, hungry, covered with sores, who would have been glad to have the crumbs and the bones which fell from the rich man's table. The wretchedness and did for him all they could, which was to lick his sores. And he cared these gentle, loving animals with his thin hands. But the rich man had no pity on Lazarus. It never once came into his head to call him to his table, and he never sent him a piece of bread or the leavings of the kitchen destined for the refuse heap, which even the scullions refused to eat. It happened that both of them, the poor man and the rich man, died, and the poor man was welcomed into Abraham's bosom, and the rich man was cast into the fire to suffer. From afar off he saw Lazarus, who was banqueting with the patriarchs, and owed him a hundred pence, a small thing compared with ten thousand talents, and he sprang on him and took him by the throat. "Pay me what thou owest and at once, or I will have thee bound by the guards." The unlucky man assaulted in this way did what his persecutor had done a little while before in the presence of the king. He fell down at his feet and besought him and wept and swore that he would pay him in a few days and kissed the hem of his garment, and recalled to him their old comradeship and begged him to wait in the name of the children who were waiting for him in his home.

receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." If thou hadst given the smallest part of thy dinner to him, when thou knewest he was hungry and was crouched at thy door in worse plight than a dog, and even the dogs had more pity

Never be led into gossiping.—Gust.

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