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Angelus: the Father reaches out to sinners as well as those who believe themselves righteous

Vatican City, 6 March 2016 – The three parables of mercy: the sheep, the coin found, and the "great parable of the prodigal son, or rather the merciful father", of the Gospel of St. Luke, were the theme of the Pope's reflection before this Sunday's Angelus prayer with the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square.

Of the three parables, the Pope selected the third, whose protagonist is a father "always willing to forgive, and who hopes against hope. Also notable is his tolerance in relation to his younger son's decision to leave home. He could have opposed his son's decision to leave home, knowing that he was still immature ... or he could have sought a lawyer so as not to give him his inheritance, since he was alive. Instead, he allows him to leave, even though he predicts the possible risks. God works with us like this", the Holy Father affirmed. "He lets us be free, even to make mistakes, because in creating us, He has given us the great gift of freedom".

"But the separation from his son is purely physical, for his father always carries him in his heart. He confidently awaits his return; surveying the road in the hope of seeing him. One day he sees him appear in the distance. This means that this father, every day, climbed on the roof to see if his son was returning. When he sees him he is moved, he runs toward him, he embraces him and kisses him. Such tenderness!"

The father also has the same attitude toward his eldest son, who remains at home, and is now indignant and protests because he does not understand and does not share the goodwill towards his brother who had erred. The father reaches out to this child too, reminding him that they had always been together and share everything, and that he has to welcome with joy his brother who has finally returned home. "And this makes me think of something", added the Holy Father. "When someone feels they are a sinner, they feel as if they are nothing ... and so this is the moment for them to turn to the Father. Instead, when a person feels righteous – 'I always did the right thing ...' – the Father comes in search of them all the same, as this attitude of feeling 'right,' is not good; it is pride. ... The Father awaits those who recognise themselves to be sinners, and goes in search of those who feel themselves righteous".

"In this parable, we also perceive a third child, hidden. And it is He Who "did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave'. This Son-Servant is Jesus. He is 'the extension of the arms and heart of the Father: He welcomed the prodigal Son and washed his dirty feet; He prepared the banquet for the feast of forgiveness. He, Jesus, teaches us to be merciful like the Father".

"The figure of the Father in the parable reveals the heart of God. He is the Merciful Father Who, in Jesus, loves us beyond all measure, always awaits our conversion whenever we make a mistake. He awaits our return when we turn away from Him thinking we can do without Him; He is always willing to open up His arms no matter what has happened. Like the Father in the Gospel, God also continues to consider us His children even when we are lost, and comes towards us with tenderness when we return to Him. He speaks to with great kindness also when we believe we are right. The errors we commit, although great, do not erase the fidelity of His love. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we can always start afresh. He welcomes us, gives us the dignity of being His children and tells us: 'Go ahead, be at peace, get up, and go forth'".
