

**Homily for Saturday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Lent  
Prior to the Women's Prayer Breakfast at  
Saint Paul Church  
Highland, Illinois**

**March 22, 2025**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good that we are here at Saint Paul Church in Highland on this Saturday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Lent prior to the Women's Prayer Breakfast.

If asked to name a favorite parable of Jesus, many people would pick the one we have just heard. The story of the prodigal son and his forgiving father has touched many people's hearts since it was first told by Jesus. Anyone who has experienced family disputes and misunderstandings and their accompanying alienation knows this perfectly well and understands this parable. It goes way beyond hurt feelings. It describes severing the bonds of love that should remain unbroken.

We easily visualize the father scanning the horizon, hoping to catch a glimpse of his wayward son until the day he does see a familiar silhouette approaching. This sight sets off unbridled joy in the household as the hurts of the past are forgiven and forgotten. But there is one who balks at joining

in the festivities: the elder son. He is offended and utters a version of that familiar adolescent complaint: "It's not fair."

We owe Saint Luke a great debt of gratitude. He alone among evangelists tells this parable. Every Christian can identify with the younger son, whose willfulness set him against his family. Gratefully, that was not the end of the story. The father waits as his younger son acts out his foolishness. Because, in a sense, we have all been there in one way or another, we are grateful for God's mercy and forgiveness. Because we are all forgiven sinners, we must not repeat the objections of the elder brother in the face of God's bountiful mercy that touches every sinner who repents.

Both readings today send us the message of returning home. The Prophet Micah invites us to see the heart of God, "who removes guilt and pardons sins, does not persist in anger forever, but delights in mercy" (v. 18). It is a way of urging us not to be not afraid, not to be hesitant. God "will cast into the depths of the sea all our sins."

The Lenten season is our opportunity to imitate the prodigal son and say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you" (v 18). God sees you, and God is waiting for you to offer His forgiveness to you through the ministry of His priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Like the wandering

son who listens to the call in his heart, “comes to his senses” (v 17), and makes the decision to come home, we are embraced by our loving Father as we partake of the Eucharist and receive the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of His dearly beloved Son, Jesus Christ, into our hearts.

May God give us this grace. Amen.