

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 15, 2019

“So he got up and went back to his father.” (Luke 15:20)

As beautiful and famous as today’s Gospel passage from Saint Luke is, it seems to have focused upon the younger son’s physical journey of returning to his father’s home, and not the interior struggle he had to overcome before he took his first step. I would like to share with you a section from Fr. Michael Muller’s book, *The Sinner’s Return to God*, offering insight into what the younger son had to face before he could start his journey.

“When the Prodigal Son arose at last to return to his loving father, the tempter stood beside him and said: ‘What are you doing? You cannot go back to your father in that plight. You are all in rags. Your father will be ashamed of you. He will not own you. Besides, the distance is too great. You will lose your way. You will be attacked by robbers and wild beasts. Moreover, you are now too weak and sickly, you will faint and die on the way. Wait yet a few days longer. This famine will not last always. You will have better times by and by. If you go back to your father, you will be scolded and treated even more harshly than before. If you go back now, every one will say that you are a coward — every one will laugh at you.’ How cunning and crafty is Satan! It is thus that this infernal spirit tries to keep the poor sinner from returning to God, his heavenly Father.” (p. 123)

How true Fr. Muller’s insights are concerning the interior struggle we all must face before we can return and be reconciled with God our Heavenly Father. I am quite positive we could construct a list of thoughts or questions each of us have faced when we debated going to confession.

I fear we modern men and women have stopped believing in the reality of the Devil. We no longer consider evil as being personified in a creature we name Satan. We associate him with red tights, pitch forks, hooves, or other Hollywood inspired references. Some ministers inadvertently present him as a rival to God. Others no longer speak of him, assuming some form of mental, emotional, or physical illness as a more educated way to read and interpret his presence in the Bible. Some, believing in their own intellectual superiority, rationalize him away attributing his existence to outdated beliefs of the uneducated, unenlightened masses. Finally, some, owing to his spiritual nature, struggle to believe in something they just cannot see with their own eyes. Could the Devil exist or is he just some “bogyman” we have created to keep children from misbehaving?

Whether one chooses to believe in the Devil or not, there is no denying that we must face a very real, very rational, and sometimes very frightening thought process when it comes to facing our sinfulness. As Catholics, we believe the Devil, or lesser demons, will try to influence this thought process away from confessing our sins and asking God’s mercy. You and I will have thoughts such as these: “I am old what could I do?” “The priest is young or not married therefore how could he ever understand?” “I could just confess my sins to God since the priest is only a man.” “If I confess to the priest, will he treat me differently?”

I am sure if we sat long enough we could come up with other ways to explain away the necessity for Sacramental Confession. Yet, like the younger son we must face these questions and overcome them to be welcomed home by our loving Father.