THE KISS OF GOD

Fourth Sunday

Jos. 5:9a, 10-12; Ps. 34
2 Co. 5:17-21; Lk. 15:1-3, 11-32

The parable of the Prodigal Son is probably the best known of all the parables of Jesus. It is the infinite story of people of every time: a feeling of discontent, the search for a carefree life, leaving home, followed by failure, desperation, nostalgia and a longing to go back. But it is also the story of God's infinite mercy.

The heart of this young man is filled with a yearning for freedom; he has dreams, plans, a desire for independence, but above all a very strong longing for utopia.

What is utopia? Translated, it means "non-place." It is an imaginary realm that exists in the mind and heart but that is not tangible nor can it be reached because it is not real. This is the "distant country" toward which the young man heads. Setting out with enthusiasm, he discovers a place that he considers to be paradise. Then a devastating famine sweeps the land, leaving in its wake emptiness, poverty, despair, death and overwhelming nostalgia.

He came to his senses: this is the beginning of conversion. The young man re-examines his life–what he was before he left home and what he had become. He also ponders the deception of utopia and his nostalgia for the *eutopia* (beautiful place) that was his father's home and which he had rejected.

I shall get up: this is a resurrection verb; it means getting to one's feet, courageously realizing that there is still a road ahead, a path that can be taken, a redemption, a new chance to get out of a situation of loneliness, despair and death. The young man moves from a longing for the sweet air of home to the courage to begin the journey back there.

Then we are presented with an image of the father, with his tenderness and love. He is described in a single sentence containing five verbs: "His father *caught sight* of his son, *was filled with compassion, ran to him, embraced him* and *kissed* him." This is the most beautiful image of God: a God who attentively scans the horizon, waiting for his child's return so that his arrival will not find him unprepared. A God who is compassionate because he feels the suffering of his child in an amplified way. A God who runs because he wants his child to reach his beautiful home as soon as possible and he sees that the boy's steps are shaky. A God who hugs, welcomes and forgives his child. And then the kiss of God, who is not disgusted by his son's disfigured and dirty face because it is made in his own image and likeness. And in that kiss we find ourselves: a forgiving love and the sweet air of home–the fragrance of God.

Fr. Giovanni Di Vito

Psalm 34

I will bless the Lord at all times,
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.
Glorify the Lord with me,
together let us exalt his name.
I sought the Lord and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.

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