

BENDING OVER OUR FIELDS TO COUNT THE PODS

Readings: Gn. 5:9,10-12; Ps. 33; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Lk. 15:1-3,11-32

From the Gospel according to Luke

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants."' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry. ...

LEARNING TO FEEL BAD

One of the greatest graces of the Christian life consists in realizing that we are living badly. Usually we make this discovery when our lives have already derailed for a while, in a soft and muffled, almost underground way. Killing me gently! The younger brother in Luke's parable realized that his life could not go on like this at a very precise moment: looking at the food in his hands. Pods for the pigs. And with his mind's eye he caught once again and grasped reality: at home, his Papa ate well, and how! Even the servants were treated like nobles. Those pods for the pigs opened the eyes of the rebellious son. They were 'lights' to help him see the misery in his heart; they were 'words' he heard announcing a possibility. It is good to feel bad. To make believe you are doing well is the way the devil works. Certainly I do not mean by 'feeling bad' those who always feel bad to make the others feel bad, victims who are aware that they are executioners. We mean exactly what the son felt in the parable: I feel bad because I am reduced to slavery, because I sold away my dignity to survive the famine; I left a father and I found a master; I left a son and I find myself a slave. He began by saying that he was reduced to these straits by his own hands; maybe they could begin to stand up and walk towards their own dignity of children and heirs. In Luke's parable, coming back to one's senses and coming back to the Father are connected movements: the Father, and my dignity. To return to him means to immediately let myself be embraced by the authentic secret of my personal existence. Uneasiness can be useful or useless. We need to learn how to feel bad 'well' without illusions or regrets; we stop; we do not postpone this awareness with the excuse of apostolic commitments. We cast out of our hearts that sense of 'feeling bad', so useless and damaging, made up of rancor, jealousy, and unrealistic expectations. We learn to say to God: "I feel bad to be far away from you – give me a helping hand". We learn to say to our brothers and sisters: "Something's not right. Listen to me". We learn to feel bad 'well', with hope and humility. We open our eyes to the flashing lights indicating that muffled, invisible slavery; we bend over the fields of our hearts and count the pigs' pods. It is a reckoning that will repay dividends. I guarantee it.

Father Giuseppe Forlai, igs

Prayer

*Lord, thank you for welcoming us,
who are sinners and publicans!*

*Sometimes we are tempted to come to you
only if we have already found the solution, only if we know what to do.*

*Then we become those who ask you
that "my" will be done more than yours.*

*Give us the trust in you that brings us to the familiarity you want in us,
so that we will always know how to seek you,
without fear or timidity, when we know what to do,
and when we are still far from understanding.*

Italian Bishops' Conference- Aids for Lent 2010