

# What About Me?

by Fr. Mark Pavlik  
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There are perhaps no words that have been so detrimental to humankind than these three: “What about me?” They have led to hatred, resentment, and jealousy, among other things.

It begins in the book of Genesis with Cain and Abel. Both brothers make an offering to God – Cain offered fruit and Abel offered animals from his flock. When God regarded Abel’s offering more than Cain’s, Cain became enraged and killed his brother. Later in Genesis, the brothers of Joseph become so jealous of their father’s love of their younger brother that they sell Joseph off to a passing caravan and tell their father he has died.

The phenomenon is not just found in family life but even among kings. In the First Book of Samuel, when David and Saul returned from slaying the Philistines, the women sang out, “Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands.” These words made Saul angry and led him to attempt to murder David numerous times. At Jesus’ birth, King Herod is so distressed by the thought of the newborn King of the Jews that he has all boys two years of age and under put to death.

In this Sunday’s gospel, at all Masses except the 10:00 am when we will celebrate the first scrutiny, Jesus addresses this very issue in a parable directed at the Pharisees and scribes. The parable is known as “the prodigal son,” but the lesson is not directed at sinners and those who are far from the Father’s love, but to those who cannot accept the Lord’s concern for those they deem unlovable. When the older son hears that his younger brother, who had left home and spent his inheritance, had returned and their father was rejoicing, he becomes enraged. “What about ME?!?” You can almost hear the words coming from his mouth. For his whole life, the older brother has served the father and never asked for anything at all. He had followed the rules, done what was expected of him and obeyed the father’s wishes, but never got so much as a young goat on which to feast with his friends. “But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.” Interestingly, he refers to his brother as “your son,” instead of “my brother,” to emphasize the estrangement.

So, “what about me?” The father’s answer to the elder son is plain and simple. “I love you. I always have and always will. Everything I have is yours and it always will be. Instead of being angry, rejoice with me that he who was lost is found.” God’s love for those who have turned from his love by no means diminishes his love for those who seek to serve him always. It reminds me of a cartoon my mother cut out of the paper years ago which depicted a mother with five small children. Another woman asked her, “How do you divide your love between all those children?” The mother answered, “I don’t divide it, I multiply it.” In the same way, God does not divide His love between His children, but multiplies it – generously sharing it.

This attitude is still around, even among followers of Christ. It seems that dynamic rears its head among people of all sorts – looking to others and being jealous of what they seem to have or how they seem to be treated. The bottom line is we are all loved by God equally and instead of worrying about ourselves and what we don’t have, perhaps we would do better to see things as God does and rejoice in the gifts of others. It is difficult to have that kind of humility and unselfishness, but it is what Jesus asks us to do, and it is what we must do. And THAT is what we are called to be about.