

Tallinn 30 March 2025
Luke 15, 11-32: Parable of the Prodigal Son

Dear brothers and sisters,

First of all, I want to thank Brothers Jacek and Alain for allowing me to preach at this Mass. It is a great honor and joy, especially since this is my first time in Tallinn and Estonia. I apologize for not trying to speak in your Estonian language; I fear that if I did, none of us would understand!

Today, on the fourth Sunday of Lent, we hear the Word of God, which speaks about losing our way in life, about sin, and about returning home—a true conversion. The most important part of this message is the mercy of our Heavenly Father. The story of the prodigal son is one of the best-known and most beautiful stories in the Bible.

When the younger son in today's Gospel "had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need," this marked the start of his journey back to his Father's home. The Gospel tells us that he "came to his senses."

This phrase, "came to his senses," can also be understood as "when he came to himself," but in the original Greek, it indicates that he started to think clearly, rationally, and reasonably. Before this moment, the boy acted as if he were intoxicated by his desire for limited personal happiness. He was lost, living outside of himself. The dramatic situation he faced opened his eyes to a new reality, helping him see the truth!

Jesus said to the Jews who believed in Him, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

What is truth for? Truth is intended to give us freedom. To be genuine, truth must help us break free. The Bible teaches us that if truth does not lead to freedom, it is not really truth. Just like medicine which must heal to be effective. It cannot merely be a substance—a liquid or a chemical—and sometimes it can even be harmful. Thus, we find truth not just by knowing it but by experiencing freedom. The more someone is trapped, the further they are from the truth.

We need to make a clear distinction between information and truth. Information informs, while truth liberates. Information delivers content, but truth provides the power required for liberation. Telling someone that they are a bad person may be just an information. It becomes truth if that information leads him to freedom. Stating that a child is hungry is merely information; it becomes truth when that statement frees the child from hunger. Saying that God is love can just be information, but it becomes truth when that love begins to liberate.

We are living in difficult times. In Ukraine, there has been a full-scale war for over three years. Many of you here in Estonia, just like in Poland, may wonder and worry whether this war will remain within Ukraine's borders or if our countries will be the next victims in a few years. I believe we can also see how much truth is currently under threat.

When the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, I asked our brother, former Master of the Dominican Order and now Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe, to write a letter to the Dominican family in Ukraine. Timothy responded immediately, and the next day, I received his message by email. He wrote, "It is often said that 'the first casualty of war is truth.' Yet the violence which is being wrought against your beautiful country is the poisoned fruit of lies. We Dominicans, with our motto *Veritas*, and our love of truth, have a special witness to give today in a world which often does not care for truth."

I agree with Timothy that every war begins with the denial of truth. However, it must also be said that truth is the first victim of war. The enemy, in their desire to take away freedom, tries to kill the truth. War starts with bombings and the destruction of airports, military sites, power plants, and gas stations, but it also begins with the destruction of truth.

Isn't the same thing happening in our families and communities? When conflicts arise and hostility appears, we often turn to lies as weapons. We may attempt to gather and then use information that can be damaging or hurtful to others.

Consider how, when the prodigal son in today's parable returns to his Father's home, the Father runs out to meet him. "While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him." He does not blame him or hold a grudge against him, even though he could be upset about the way the son wasted the family's wealth. Instead, the Father calls him: "My son."

In this way, the Father shows the true nature of his child. By doing this, he restores his son's lost dignity and sets him free.

Let us pray for the strength to accept the truth that brings freedom and leads us back to the mercy of our Father. Amen.

Jaroslav Krawiec OP
Provincial Vicar of Ukraine