

Homily for September 16, 2007 - 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Some churches have a sign on the front lawn advertising the title of the preacher's sermon. Had our parish such a sign, this week it would read: "The Prodigal Son and Coach Bill Belichick."

In fact, comparing the coach with the prodigal son might help us come to a better understanding of this parable.

- The prodigal son boldly demanded his inheritance, (which his father handed over to him) then the son packed up his gear and headed for the big city.

- The coach, on the sly, sent an assistant to the sidelines to tape the New York Jets after Commissioner Roger Goodell had sent a memo stipulating no unauthorized videotaping on the field

- The turning point for the prodigal son occurs when "he comes to his senses," recognizing that his choices have left him alone, ashamed and starving.

- The turning point for the coach occurs when Eric Mangini tips off the Jets and stadium security nabs the videographer.

- The prodigal son experiences himself as "lost."

- The coach experiences himself as "found out."

- The prodigal son says,
"I shall get up and go to my father and say to him, 'I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.'"

- The coach says,
"It's a league thing. I don't even know a lot of the details... I'll make a comment when it's over... I apologize for the distraction my mistake caused... It doesn't matter. It already happened..."

- The prodigal son returns home and confesses to his father.

- The coach walks out of a press conference.

- The prodigal son gets a new wardrobe and jewelry,
a Welcome Home Party and a barbecue.

- The coach gets a \$500,000 fine and loses a first round draft pick.

Which brings us to the most important difference of all in the story.

True enough, Bill Belichick is not the prodigal son.

But more important:

Commissioner Roger Goodell is not the father in the parable!

-Goodell fines the coach and the Patriots and penalizes them.

-The father of the prodigal

doesn't even let his son finish his confession:

he wants the welcome home party to start right away!

The father imposes no penalty, requires no penance,

asks no restitution.

And the father in the parable is meant to be the father of us all,
the God whom Jesus reveals.

If this father appears to be foolish, wasteful, or unfair,
then we have assumed the mindset of the older brother.

(In the world of sports,

perhaps the role of the older grudging older brother

is played by those who say,

"Hey! Everybody cheats a little - how come our team gets busted?")

The truth is that every time we gather at this table,

we come as prodigal daughters and sons who, in so many ways,

have squandered the gifts God gave us:

we have ignored, forgotten, wasted and even thrown them away.

Still, long before we caught sight of this table this morning,

the Father caught sight of us and, filled with compassion,

prepared this feast for us:

not the feast of a slaughtered calf

but the feast of the sacrifice of his only Son,

the supper of the Son who was willing to lavish his love

upon us who squander that very love.

When we are lost he seeks us out, finds us, brings us home,

embraces, kisses and welcomes us again to the table of his mercy
and the company of his Beloved.

- *Rev. Austin Fleming*