The Return of the Prodigal Son, Lionella Spada (1576–1622)

So, the young man decided that he would journey back and tell his father, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you" (Luke 15:18). When the father saw his son coming, he ran to him and greeted him. The father was full of love and forgiveness. The son admitted that he had sinned against his father, but the father quickly embraced him. The father made a feast and invited all to celebrate the return of his son, saying, "This son of mine was dead, and has come to *life again; he was lost, and has been found*" (Luke 15:24).

In this parable, the younger son's actions show his *conversion*. He turned back to his father. He was sorry and was forgiven. He again had the opportunity to share in his father's life and love. And, in this parable, the father's actions remind us of God's mercy. God waits for us to come back to him. God wants us to experience the lasting joy of his presence. And he rejoices when we decide to turn back to him and accept his love.

Jesus calls us to conversion.

Many of us may think that happiness is just something that "happens" to us if and when we get the things that we want. Possessions, pleasure, luxury, power, or fame can bring us happiness, but is that the happiness that brings us lasting joy?

In one of his parables, Jesus told his disciples about a man who had two sons. In the story the younger son asked his father for his share of the family's fortune. Maybe this young man was looking for happiness. But certainly he wanted something more from life than what he had. And when his father gave him his inheritance he set off to live life on his own. Would it be a happy, carefree life? Maybe for a while, but after the young man spent all his money, he realized that the things that had brought him happiness were gone. He was hungry and alone. He wanted to go home, even if it was only to be treated as a hired worker.

> **"The heart is the place of decision . . . the place of truth, where we choose life or death."**
> (CCC, 2563)

Jesus called his first disciples to **conversion**, turning back to God with all one's heart. And he calls us, his disciples today, to continual conversion, too. Jesus leads us to God our Father, inviting us to change our lives and turn to God completely. Our lifelong conversion involves a constant change of heart, since "the heart is the place of decision . . . the place of truth, where we choose life or death" *(CCC, 2563). And through God the Holy Spirit we are given the desire* to change and grow. We are given the grace to begin again. We can find a new life of happiness, sharing in God's life and love each day. We can look forward to the lasting joy of eternal salvation.

Faith Word
conversion

Activity **Rewrite the parable about the younger son as if it were taking place in today's world. Take turns reading or performing your modern-day versions of the parable. Discuss the way conversion is shown in each parable.**