

June, 2020

READING GUIDE ~ *The Return of the Prodigal Son – A Story of Homecoming* by Henri J.M. Nouwen

Our All School Read is a little book with a big impact. Inspired by the parable Jesus tells of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32), Dutch artist, Van Rijn Rembrandt (1606-1699), painted a masterpiece. Acquired by Catherine the Great in 1776, the 8'x6' painting hangs in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia.

In 1983, Dutch Catholic priest, professor, theologian, and writer, Henri Nouwen (1932-1996) cast his eyes upon a print of this most famous painting, and he went deep with it. So deep that he just had to see the original, so, in 1986, he traveled to St. Petersburg and spent several graced hours perusing the painting, which captures the moment for the wayward young man's return to the arms of his loving father.

This book, published in 1992, takes us on Nouwen's journey from his encounter with the print of the painting to his trip to see the original in the Hermitage and ultimately to his deep analysis of the parable.

Our mentors – specially our English, Writing, History, Religion, and Art teachers – will have much to say about this interdisciplinary gem.

Please note that the front cover unfolds in such a way that you will always have the painting in full view no matter what page you happen to be reading.

I am supremely confident that, at the end of your reading experience, you will have gained a deeper understanding of the New Testament parable and a greater appreciation for the finest fine art.

Two more things:

- Henri Nouwen has been a favorite of mine for many years. In fact, *Words from the Heart – A year of quotations from Headmaster William L. Burke III and others who inspire*, which we published last year, includes three Nouwen entries:

June 15: Mercy comes from a compassionate heart; it comes from a desire to be equal.

October 24: As long as we know that our lives will always speak louder than words, we can trust that our words will remain humble.

December 14: When we truly enjoy God's unlimited generosity, we will be grateful for what our brothers and sisters receive. Jealousy will simply have no place in our hearts.

- Our book offers a perfect introduction to our upcoming year's theme: RETURN.

Happy reading! May God continue to bless you and your loved ones this summer and always.

With love and gratitude,

William L. Burke III
Headmaster