

## STREETS

Just Why Do People Live on the Streets in Our Cities?

Out on the Streets

When the Prodigal Son finally gave up, and headed for home, what sort of reception did he expect to get? His father was overjoyed to see him – but he himself didn't know that that was how it was going to be; his father – he might reasonably have imagined – could have set the dogs on him.

It is said that *home* is the place where, when you go there (perhaps after years of absence, perhaps after really making a mess of things) they *have* to take you in – but it's not always the case.

Many young people today left home (or were thrown out) soon after their (divorced?) mother/father acquired a new partner. When the young person (*if* the young person), having tried many things and failed, having no job, money, or place to live, returns "home", are they likely to be taken in? In some cases no doubt, but not all by any means.

Recently, when out in my home town somewhat later in the evening than is usual for me, I saw three, or maybe four, young people lying in the street, having just a sleeping bag, and maybe a few blankets, in what was then (late January) a *very* cold night; I reckoned that I myself could have stood it for an hour or two at the most, and the knowledge that they were rather younger than me – 68 that very day - was no consolation or mitigation.

Sadly, my town is very far from being unusual in this way. Some tell us that people choose to live on the streets, that they all, *really*, have a flat/house to go back to, and that begging actually raises a decent income. But on that night, I failed to credit such arguments one bit – no one would *choose* to be out, on nights like that, for any length of time at all.

Thankfully, there are charities which try to support such people, many of them Christian, and try to address the reasons (political, economic, but ultimately moral/spiritual) why such terrible things occur. It is surely our Christian duty to support those efforts.

February 2019

*Happiness, Truth & Holy Images. Essays of Popular Religion and Religion & Art* – the latest from Twin Books – was published on February 25<sup>th</sup>. Copies (£7.50) are available from [www.twinbooks.co.uk](http://www.twinbooks.co.uk)