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4th hour

ODYSSEUS THE HERO

"A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles." Those words, spoken by Christopher Reeve, basically sum up who Odysseus is. Homer wrote about Odysseus and his journeys that made him a hero in *The Odyssey.* Odysseus is a hero for many reasons. Odysseus is a hero because he was dedicated to his family and, during his dangerous journeys, he tried to save as many of his men as he could.

Odysseus is a herobecause he is dedicated to his family. Odysseus joined forces with his son, Telemachus, to fight off the suitors who were trying to steal his wife, castle, and wealth. The suitors had told Penelope, his wife, that Odysseus was dead. The suitors lied to her because they wanted Odysseus' wealth. The suitors were eating all of Ithaca's food supply and would have married Penelope. "He dropped his eyes and nodded, and the prince Telemachus, true son of King Odysseus, belted his sword on, clapped hand to his spear, and with a clink and glitter of keen bronze stood by his chair, in the forefront near his father" (XXI, 446-508). Telemachus received Odysseus' final signal that it was time to attack. If Telemachus had done it alone, he would have died. Odysseus may have died if he tried by himself as well. Odysseus and Telemachus did what they needed to do to save Ithaca, Odysseus' home. Odysseus saved Ithaca because he joined forces with Telemachus.

Furthermore, Odysseus is a hero because, during his dangerous journeys, he tried to save as many of his men as he could. Odysseus sailed toward Scylla, the three-headed sea monster, instead of Charybdis, the giant whirlpool. Odysseus knew that if they sailed towards Charybdis, they would all die. If they sailed towards Scylla, while some of his men would die, it was the best choice to make sure some of his men lived. "You at the tiller, listen, and take in all that I say- the rudders are your duty; keep her out of the combers and the smoke; steer for that headland; watch the drift, or we fetch up in the smother, and you drown us" (XII, 259-355). Odysseus instructs his men to listen. He didn't tell them of what lied ahead, of what they would be facing; he knew that they could do nothing but follow those instructions. Odysseus warned them about Charybdis when he talked about drowning. A hero would do what Odysseus did. A hero must sometimes make difficult decisions. He saved more men by not telling them about Scylla because, if they panicked, no one would be rowing and they would be sitting ducks. Odysseus is a hero for making the difficult decision and trying to save as many of his men as he could possibly save.

Some argue that Odysseus is not a hero because he cheated on Penelope. Being faithful means not cheating or hooking up with anyone else while your married. You can't just start dating another woman. It's not right. "A rocky isle, but good for a boy's training; I shall not see on earth a place more dear, though I have been detained long by Calypso, loveliest among goddesses, who held me in her smooth caves, to be her heart's delight, as Circe of Aeaea, the enchantress, desired me, and detained me in her hall. But in my heart I never gave consent" (Sailing From Troy). Odysseus never gave consent to them, in his heart. He let them because he had to, otherwise he wouldn't have. It got Odysseus home. Those who say Odysseus is not a hero because he cheated, are wrong. Odysseus slept with Circe to get his men changed back. Odysseus slept with Calypso because she would have killed him if he hadn't. Clearly, Odysseus did the right thing because he made it home. If he was a true cheater, why bother to save Penelope from the suitors when he got home? As I mentioned above, being a hero means making difficult decisions. Odysseus made the decision to cheat with Circe in order to save his men. He made the decision to cheat with Calypso so that he could return home to his beloved Penelope. Odysseus is a hero whether he cheated or not.

As you can see, Odysseus is a hero for a variety of reasons but mainly for being dedicated to his family and for trying to protect as many men as he could. Odysseus protected his home from the suitors who were eating all their food. Odysseus could have stayed away but he saw how the suitors acted. He saved Penelope from having to marry one of them. Odysseus kept the peace by not telling his men about Scylla but instructing them on what to do. He could have told them and let them freak out but he didn't because he knew they wouldn't row and all of them would die. He could have tried to sail between Scylla and Charybdis but, if the men sailed a little off course, they all could have died at the hands of Charybdis. When you hear Odysseus' name, think of a true hero.