

Weekend Readings & Reflections

March 26-27, 2022 – Fourth Sunday of Lent

Reflection: *In today's First Reading, God forgives "the reproach" of the generations who grumbled against Him after the Exodus. On the threshold of the promised land, Israel can with a clean heart celebrate the Passover, the feast of God's firstborn son (see Joshua 5:6-7; Exodus 4:22; 12:12-13). Reconciliation is also at the heart of the story Jesus tells in today's Gospel. The story of the Prodigal Son is the story of Israel and of the human race. But it is also the story of every believer. In Baptism, we're given a divine birthright, made "a new creation," as Paul puts it in today's Epistle. But when we sin, we're like the Prodigal Son, quitting our Father's house, squandering our inheritance in trying to live without Him. Lost in sin, we cut ourselves off from the grace of sonship lavished upon us in Baptism. It is still possible for us to come to our senses, make our way back to the Father, as the prodigal does. But only He can remove the reproach and restore the divine sonship we have spurned. Only He can free us from the slavery to sin that causes us—like the Prodigal Son—to see God not as our Father but as our master, One we serve as slaves. God wants not slaves but children. Like the father in today's Gospel, He longs to call each of us "My son," to share His life with us, to tell us: "Everything I have is yours." The Father's words of longing and compassion still come to His prodigal children in the Sacrament of Penance. This is part of what Paul today calls "the ministry of reconciliation" entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles and the Church. Reconciled like Israel, we take our place at the table of the Eucharist, the homecoming banquet the Father calls for His lost sons, the new Passover we celebrate this side of heaven. We taste the goodness of the Lord, as we sing in today's Psalm, rejoicing that we who were dead are found alive again.*

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome our discussion on the Fourth Sunday of Lent. Let's begin by praying together from Psalm 130:

All: Out of the depths I call to you, Lord; Lord, hear my cry! May your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, Lord, mark our sins, Lord, who can stand? But with you is found forgiveness and so you are revered. I wait with longing for the Lord, my soul waits for his word. My soul looks for the Lord more than sentinels for daybreak. More than sentinels for daybreak, let Israel look for the Lord, for with the Lord is kindness, with him is full redemption, And God will redeem Israel from all their sins. Amen.

Leader: *We are all searching for happiness, just like the prodigal son in today's Gospel reading. In today's Gospel reading we hear a familiar story of a man desperately seeking happiness - but in the wrong places. Looking back on your life, think about a time you pursued something you thought would make you happy but didn't. Reflect on what God is calling you to today. Are you open to God's generosity and mercy? Even for others? Let's watch this video on FORMED together as we get started. (this week is audio only)*

(Play the video on FORMED.org - [Opening the Word – Fourth Sunday in Lent \(Year C\)](#))

FIRST READING ~ Joshua 5:9a, 10-12 ~

The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you." While the Israelites were encamped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, they celebrated the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth of the month. On the day after the Passover, they ate of the produce of the land in the form of unleavened cakes and parched grain. On that same day after the Passover, on which they

Digging Deeper Our Restless Hearts

"You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised: great is your power and your wisdom is without measure. And man, so small a part of your creation, wants to praise you: this man, though clothed with mortality and bearing the evidence of sin and the proof that you withstand the proud. Despite everything, man, though but a small a part of your creation, wants to praise you. You yourself encourage him to delight in your praise, for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."
- St. Augustine

ate of the produce of the land, the manna ceased. No longer was there manna for the Israelites, who that year ate of the yield of the land of Canaan.

While Moses was a great leader and teacher, the courage of Joshua was needed to face the challenge of entering the promised land. The manna ceased. They were now to work for their food.

- *What change has God been trying to work in you and teach you this Lent?*

SECOND READING ~ 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 ~

Brothers and sisters: Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

St Paul wanted to teach the Corinthian community that faith in Jesus was more than believing one's sins are forgiven. God has also given us the ministry of reconciliation in the world. Reconciliation between people, the community, and with God is a Christian's top priority.

- *What relationships need reconciling in your life? Who could you start with?*

GOSPEL ~ Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 ~

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So to them Jesus addressed this parable: "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has

slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, ‘Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’ He said to him, ‘My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’”

In the middle of Lent the Church encourages us to look at our understanding of God with the parable of the prodigal son. It is Jesus teaching us what the Fathers love is really like. The Pharisees were complaining that Jesus did not obey the laws of keeping separate from sinners. Surely God does not want to get contaminated with sinners?

- *What do you honestly think is God’s response to your sinfulness? What image do you have of God? The young son commits the biggest sin possible for a young Jewish person. Asking for the inheritance was like wishing Dad was dead! Yet the father’s love does not change.*

- *Do you feel distant from God because of something you have done? Will you accept the love that the Father shows to his child is the same love that is shown to you? Will you accept this love in the sacrament of reconciliation this Lent? What might hold you back?*

The parable of the Prodigal (Reckless) Son is also called the Parable of the Prodigal Father. So unconditional is the Father’s love that neither the youngest son or eldest son fully accept it. The parable ends without a resolution.

- *Will God’s children accept his unconditional love and enjoy the fattened calf and banquet? Can you glimpse this invitation in the celebration of the Eucharist?*

MEDITATION

What's worse than being separated from your home, loved ones, and friends? The pain of separation can only be surpassed by the joy of the homecoming and reunion. When God commanded his people to celebrate the Passover annually, he wanted them to never forget what He did for them when He freed them from oppression and slavery in the land of Egypt and brought them back to their promised homeland which He gave as a sign of His immense love and favor. At the end of their wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, Joshua, the successor to Moses, led the people in celebrating the Passover meal after they had safely passed over the River Jordan to their promised homeland (Joshua 5:9-12).

This crossing over from a land of slavery and oppression to a land of promise and freedom is a sign that foreshadows the true freedom and homecoming which the Lord Jesus has won for us in His kingdom. Through His victory on the cross the Lord Jesus has delivered us from the dominion of sin and darkness and transferred us to His kingdom of light, truth, and forgiveness (Colossians 1:13-14). God offers this freedom to all who believe in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God does not desire the final death of anyone (Ezekiel 18:23). That is why He sent us His only-begotten Son to set us free from slavery to sin, Satan, and death and to restore us to everlasting peace, joy, and abundant life with our Father in heaven.

Jesus illustrates this passover from slavery to sin and condemnation to freedom and new life in Christ with the longest parable recorded in the Gospels (Luke 15:11-32). What is the main point of Jesus' story about two ungrateful sons and their extravagant loving father? Is it the contrast between a grudging obedient son and a rebellious son who had wished his father was

dead? Or the warm reception given to a spendthrift son and the cold reception given by the eldest son?

Jesus does contrast the eldest son's cold and aloof reception for his errant brother with the father's warm embrace and lavish homecoming party for his repentant son. While the errant son had wasted his father's money, his father, nonetheless, maintained unbroken love for his son. The son, while he was away, learned a lot about himself. And he realized that his father had given him love which he had not returned. He had yet to learn about the depth of his father's love for him.

His deep humiliation at finding himself obliged to feed on the husks of pigs and his reflection on all he had lost, led to his repentance and decision to declare himself guilty before his father. While he hoped for reconciliation with his father, he could not have imagined a full restoration of relationship. The father did not need to speak words of forgiveness to his son; his actions spoke more loudly and clearly! The beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet symbolize the new life - pure, worthy, and joyful - of every person who returns to God.

The prodigal could not return to the garden of innocence, but he was welcomed and reinstated as a son who had been missed much and greatly loved by his father. The errant son's dramatic change from grief and guilt to forgiveness and restoration express in picture-language the resurrection from the dead which Jesus makes possible to everyone who believes in Him, a rebirth to new life from death.

The parable also contrasts mercy and its opposite - unforgiveness. The father who had been wronged, was forgiving. But the eldest son, who had not been wronged, was unforgiving. His unforgiveness turns into spiteful pride and contempt for his brother. And his resentment leads to his isolation and estrangement from the community of forgiven sinners.

In this parable Jesus gives a vivid picture of God and what God is like. God is truly kinder than any of us. He does not lose hope or give up when we stray from Him. He is always on the lookout for those who have a change of heart and want to return. He rejoices in finding the lost and in welcoming them home.

- *Do you know the joy of repentance and the restoration of relationship as a son or daughter of your heavenly Father?*
- *Placing yourself in the Gospel parable, can you relate to either or both of the sons? Or the father? Or the other servants? Do I sometimes allow pride and contempt to get in my way of celebrating with others 'success'?*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing, let us pray together:

ALL: Lord Jesus, may I never doubt your love nor take for granted the mercy you have shown to me. Fill me with your transforming love that I may be merciful as you are merciful. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

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