

Scripture Study

Fourth Sunday of Lent – Cycle C



Opening prayer

Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

(Ps 34:2-7)

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Luke 15:1-3,11-32

Overview of the Gospel:

- Today's Gospel, the parable of the prodigal son, is one of three parables (see verses 4-10) that Jesus addresses to the Pharisees who challenged him for associating with "tax collectors and sinners" who flocked to hear Jesus' words (verses 1-2).
- The Pharisees were a religious party of Jesus' day who prided themselves on strictly keeping to the prescriptions of the Jewish purity laws. Many of them were undoubtedly holy men, and they were generally respected by the people for their holiness and their refusal to cooperate with the occupying Romans. Some Pharisees, however, became legalistic and judgmental in their attitude toward those who did not meet their standards. These set themselves up in opposition to Jesus and his followers. They may also have been jealous when the despised tax collectors and sinners were drawn to Jesus and his gospel of mercy.
- This Sunday's parable can more accurately be called the parable of the forgiving father, since he can be seen as the main figure in the story. Just as God the Father is always ready to let us exercise our free will and go our own ways, in his mercy and compassion he is more than ready to be on the lookout for the least sign of our returning in repentance to him, and welcoming us home. As Jesus teaches earlier in this chapter, "there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7,11).

Questions:

- What stages does the younger son go through on his pilgrimage (verses 13-16)? What brings him to his senses? What does he realize then? With what sort of attitude does he approach his father? How does the father receive his son? Why?
- How does the older brother feel about the younger brother's return? Why? How does the father answer the older brother's objections (verse 29)?
- What's Jesus' point with this parable? What does this story teach about sin, repentance and God's love? What does the First Reading tell us about God's care for us and his solicitude to carry us through trials and temptations to the end?
- Comparing yourself to the two brothers in this parable, who are you most like? Why? How have you experienced God as similar to this father?
- Consider verse 31: What does God have to give you that you have not taken?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1439, 545, 1443, 2839, 2795

Closing prayer

I'm certain of this - that if my conscience were burdened with all the sins it's possible to commit, I would still go and throw myself into our Lord's arms, my heart all broken up with contrition; I know what tenderness He has for any prodigal child of His that comes back to Him. –St. Therese of Lisieux

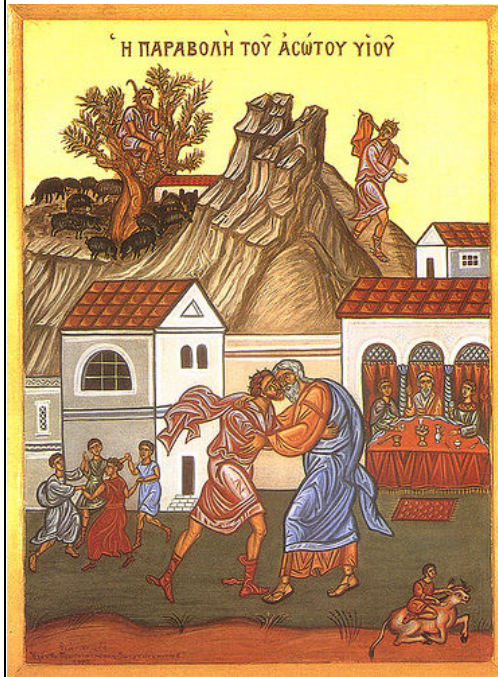
Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!

“I will arise and go to my father”

Gospel Reading: *Luke 15:1-3, 11-32*

Meditation: What's worst than being separated from one's loved ones, home, 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 slavery and death in Egypt and led them safely through the wilderness to their promised homeland. God desires that none of his children should be separated from their true homeland in heaven with him.

Jesus illustrates this Passover from spiritual death to life and from the slavery of sin to freedom with the longest parable recorded in the gospels. What is the main point of Jesus' story about two ungrateful sons and their extravagant father? Is it the contrast between an obedient and a disobedient son? Or the reception given to a spendthrift son by the father and the 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 rather lavish party and warm embrace 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 anyone who returns to God.

The prodigal could not return to the garden of innocence, but he was welcomed and reinstated as a son. The errant son's dramatic change from grief and guilt to forgiveness and restoration express in picture-language the resurrection from the dead, a rebirth to new life from spiritual 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 contempt and pride. 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 us. He does not lose hope or give up when we stray. 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?

"Lord Jesus, may I never doubt your love or 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."

*Meditation: © Don Schwager
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