

Fourth Sunday of Lent Year C Readings Lectionary: 33

Reading I - [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 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.

Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7](#). R. (9a) Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Reading II - [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.

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.'"

According to the liturgical season of the Church for the fourth Sunday of Lent, we rejoice, mindful of the eternal covenant that was struck on Good Friday of the death of our Lord and sealed on Easter Sunday of His resurrection. We rejoice that God so loved the world he sent his only Son, and that even given our insistence on breaking the covenant, the ways in which we have increasingly reflected upon this Lent – God does not withhold mercy and forgiveness from we who are contrite of heart, seek to be transformed, and to be the saints God calls and empowers us to become.

Lent is a time to more intentionally allow the light of Christ to illumine for us the ways in which we convince ourselves that we don't need the sacrament of reconciliation, we don't need to worship God by going to Mass, we don't need to listen to everything Jesus said or do everything he told us to do. Lent is a purposeful time of renewing our commitment to living what we say we believe when we recite the creed. It is a time to make greater effort to reorder that which is disordered, balance where there is disharmony, and regroup ourselves in the truth of God where distortions and error have arisen.

Allowing ourselves to fall into a routine, powerlessness in our friendship with God will inevitably lead to gradually letting ourselves be drawn away from Christ, bit by bit, little by little. We ignore one little teaching of the Church, and then it becomes easier to ignore another, and another, and another. We ignore our conscience and give in to the temptation to lie a little bit, or to steal a little bit, and then next time it's easier to ignore our conscience, and the lie gets bigger. We love some of our neighbors as our-self, but we treat others with indifference, as if Christ didn't die for them. This is how we become the prodigal child.

But the spiritual awake disciple of Christ will strive to be aware of the areas of in themselves and their lives which have become ruled by negative forces like bigotry, bitterness, jealousy, anger, resentment, greed, vindictiveness, injustice or violence. That disciple will readily recognize the need to repent. Truly repent, not just regret and sorrow, but to have the willingness to allow the Lord to make radical changes in me and in my life. It calls for a re-ordering of my relationships with God, Father-Son-Holy Spirit, with other people and with myself. It means real ongoing conversion.

Those of you who do seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation, if those confessions over the years do not seem to change very much, it may well be that you regret your actions and are sad about the consequences, but the lack of actual change, of transformation wrought by grace implies a lack of interest or effort to cooperate with God's desire to heal and make you a new creation.

Part of the renewal experience of Lent is to try to become more fully committed disciples of Jesus and to share more deeply his values, his outlook and his attitudes, putting on the mind of Christ. If we want to experience Christian joy, we must decide to do so. Christian joy is the possession of the one good thing that can fully satisfy our hearts, so we never get tired of it. It is the possession of the one good thing that doesn't change, never wears out, never breaks, and never goes away. When Aquinas speaks of this Christian Joy, he says that it is not a virtue distinct from charity, but an act, or effect, of charity: it is a fruit of virtue - the firm and frequently renewed decision to stay close to Christ, to follow him faithfully.

What is this one good thing that makes Christian joy possible? It is God's loving attention. God is always paying attention to us, knowing us and loving us, perfectly. The father in the parable exemplifies this in human expression, because that's what the human person is made for, to be known and loved completely.

When we turn keep our focus on God, we become more acutely aware of God paying attention to us, knowing and loving us, and that fills us with joy. That's why the Psalm says, "Look to him that you may be radiant with joy." That's what the Church is reminding us of today: Rejoice! God is thinking of you!

God never gives up on us. God pursues us, inviting us and empowering us to trust and follow. Jesus is always here with us, in the tabernacle, waiting, eager to spend time with us, no matter how confused and wounded we may be. Isn't that the message of the sacrament of confession? The pathway to God's mercy is always open – we can always come and ask for forgiveness, renewed strength, and a joy filled heart for the journey.

I think we all understand this with our heads, but do we understand it with our hearts? If we don't, we will never really move forward in our journey towards spiritual maturity. There are two key indicators we can use to evaluate how deeply this truth has penetrated our hearts. First, discouragement. Discouragement is a feeling we get when we become blinded by our failures and limitations. Discouragement never comes from the Holy Spirit. It makes us blind to the truth that with God, even our biggest failures can be redeemed. If our hearts are confident in God's mercy, we will be able to recover quickly from discouragement. Second, forgiveness. God is eagerly ready to forgive us, and this makes us eagerly ready to forgive others. In fact, if we find it hard to forgive, it could be a sign that we haven't let the truth of God's mercy make its way from our heads to our hearts.

This Lent and at every Eucharistic Celebration, the angels and the saints rejoice at the return of each and every prodigal child. Make the words of the son in this parable be your own prayer to God. Let the Father embrace you, celebrate your return, and fill you rejoicing.

Reflection Questions

1. Explore the theological significance of the cessation of manna in the First Reading in light of the themes of the Fourth Sunday of Lent, particularly the concept of new life in Christ presented in the Second Reading and the Parable of the Prodigal Son.
2. Analyze the character of the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, discussing how his actions and words reveal the nature of God's love and mercy towards humanity, especially in the context of reconciliation.
3. Discuss the role of repentance and conversion in the Christian life, drawing upon the themes presented in all three readings for the Fourth Sunday of Lent and the accompanying reflection. How does the Sacrament of Reconciliation contribute to this process?
4. Compare and contrast the reactions of the two brothers in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. What lessons can be learned from their responses regarding our own attitudes towards forgiveness, justice, and God's boundless grace?
5. Explain the connection between Christian joy and God's loving attention, as discussed in the reflection. How can a deeper awareness of God's presence and love transform our lives, particularly during the season of Lent?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Reproach of Egypt:** In the context of the First Reading, this likely refers to the shame or stigma of their former enslavement in Egypt and their wandering in the desert. God removing this signifies a new beginning and acceptance.
- **Passover:** A major Jewish holiday commemorating the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The celebration in the Promised Land signifies the fulfillment of God's promises.
- **Manna:** The miraculous food provided by God to the Israelites during their wandering in the desert. Its cessation symbolizes the end of a period of dependence on extraordinary provision and the beginning of sustenance from the Promised Land.
- **Reconciliation:** The act of restoring friendly relations between estranged parties. In a theological context, it refers to God's act of bringing humanity back into a right relationship with Himself through Christ.

- **New Creation:** A theological concept referring to the transformative effect of being united with Christ, where one's old self is replaced by a new, spiritually renewed being.
- **Ministry of Reconciliation:** The role given to believers by God to spread the message of reconciliation and call others to be reconciled to Him.
- **Contrite of Heart:** Feeling or expressing remorse for sins or offenses; penitent.
- **Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession):** A Catholic sacrament in which penitents confess their sins to a priest and receive absolution, thereby being reconciled with God and the Church.
- **Dissipation:** Foolish waste of money, resources, or opportunities.
- **Fattened Calf:** In the parable, this represents a lavish offering and celebration, signifying great joy and honor upon the younger son's return.
- **Bigotry:** Intolerance toward those holding different opinions.
- **Vindictiveness:** Having or showing a strong or unreasoning desire for revenge.
- **Conversion:** A significant change of heart and direction in one's life, often involving a turning towards God and a commitment to spiritual growth.
- **Charity:** In a theological sense, this refers to selfless love, especially divine love for humanity and human love for God and neighbor.
- **Eucharistic Celebration (Mass):** The central act of worship in the Catholic Church, commemorating the Last Supper of Jesus Christ.
- **Tabernacle:** In Catholic churches, the ornamented receptacle where the consecrated Eucharist is reserved.