

Homily For the 4th Sunday of Lent - Year C

St. Peter's 8:00/9:30/11:30 Sunday Masses - March 27, 2022

Joshua 5:9-12 "The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land."

Psalm 34:1-6 "His praise shall be continually in my mouth. The Lord delivered me from all my fears."

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself."

Luke 15:1-3 "Let us eat and celebrate, for my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found."

Which Brother Are You?

Introduction

Today, in this Laetare Sunday ("Rejoice Sunday"), the fourth Sunday of Lent, we hear again that part of Luke's Gospel where Jesus explains his unprecedented practice of forgiving sins to reconcile people to God. Jesus makes us feel that even the worst sinner is so very important to God that He does not want to lose him in any way; and that He, with great joy, is always willing to grant us forgiveness.

Today, we could simply pray with the psalmist and leave it at that: I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall be continually in my mouth. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. But we need more than this prayer. We need conversion of heart.

Luke

In the time of Jesus, it would have been common for people to use words from the scriptures when talking to each other. For us this would be like saying to someone in a conversation: Do to others what you would like them to do to you, or "fight the good fight" or "He's a wolf in sheep's clothing" or "Rise and shine" or "Go the extra mile" or "By the skin of your teeth" or "a fly in the ointment". You get the idea. We hardly know that these are expressions directly from the bible, but in Jesus' day they would know that these were scriptural passages.

A frequently used expression in our time refers to being a 'prodigal son'. That's simply someone who has been away and has come back. So we have kind of taken the deeper meaning out of the expression. It is the title of the parable that Jesus uses to explain to the Pharisees and scribes why he eats with sinners. The point is really that we are all sinners and Jesus wants to sit down to eat with all of us. If we don't think we are sinners, then we will always be outside of that relationship.

That's the problem with most of the Pharisees. They point to others and say, well there are the sinners. It's the reason that they can never appreciate what Jesus says and does as coming from God. In fact, this is what we see happening in the world today. Cancel culture is built on the idea that some people or groups can say: I am good but that person is bad and deserves to be canceled or publically shamed. Pharisees are everywhere and the temptation is very great for each of us to fall into that trap.

In answer to them, Jesus tells a wild story about a crazy father and two sons. The younger demands his share of the inheritance. In the process, he is asking for what isn't given until after the death of the father. So, he is essentially desiring the death of the father. His heart has clearly been turned selfishly towards himself for some time and it has led him to this pretty horrible demand. The second problem is that he is asking for what actually belongs to the older son. That inheritance doesn't even belong to him.

Historically, we sometimes look back and judge what previous societies have done, without understanding why it was that way. The time of the so called Enlightenment, around the end of the 18th century, was actually when the modern attack on the family really got started. It has been going on in earnest for 200 years now. In Europe, family property was always passed on to the oldest son. But there was a movement to make laws to require that family property to be divided amongst all the children. This might seem to be more fair to us. But look at what happened. Each time the family property was divided amongst a few or even many children, there was less and less to support each family. Family

members in the next two generations became poor and had to give up the little they had inherited. They were then sitting ducks for ending up working for starvation wages in the new factories.

When the younger son asked for his inheritance, he was attacking his father, his brother, and the whole viability of the family system. But what does the father in the parable do? He gives the son what he asks for. That doesn't seem wise, but Jesus' story is an almost ridiculous exaggeration of the terrible sin of those who demand everything in selfishness. But also it shows how God will not stop us from our selfish ways. We have to realize our sin and turn back to God. The son rejects the father. Sin is a rejection of God's fatherhood.

The son, like everyone who gives in to selfishness, doesn't control himself. He spends it all on partying. But times turn bad and he has nothing. He is in a far away land, which tells us how far he is from God. That can happen to us. It's not as ridiculous as we might think. But circumstances can help us. As it says about the son, he came to his senses. He regains the ability to think properly. That's what we are called to do during Lent, to think properly about our lives and consider where we have wandered far away from the Father who loves us.

When the son comes to his senses, he realizes that he has lost the natural worthiness that was his from his father. He thought he was gaining everything of value but now realizes he was giving away everything of value, the family bond. He practices what he will say to his father: I have sinned against heaven and against you and am no longer worthy to be called your son.

The point is we never are worthy of that position or status. God gives it freely to us. That's why the Father in the parable is not an idiot like it looks. He is the one who gives the status of a son and daughter. He only waits for us to come to our senses. He knows how bad his children can be. He knows how far away from him we can wander. But we have a God who is always ready to forgive us and be reconciled to us. He is the God of reconciliation. Jesus can tell us the parable in truth because he is the one who is the embodiment of the reconciling God. He eats with sinners.

Lent is our time to recognize our sinfulness, not so we can feel badly about ourselves, but so we can respond to the invitation to the feast with the Son of God who is always and perfectly faithful. To be reconciled is to rise and go back to the Father through the Son.

What about the older son. In a way, we should probably talk more about him than the younger. He has pretty much always done what he was told. He has a right to be angry with his brother and his father for taking his brother back. But his heart has also been long turning away from his father. He has been hiding behind his good behaviour to justify a lack of love, a lack of forgiveness, a lack of being truly of one heart with his father. He is really the Pharisee in the story. And, as the parable ends, the question of whether he will go into the feast is unanswered. That's where you and I come in. Will we hold on to our bitterness or will we let this lenten time bring us to our senses and return to God with our whole hearts?

A modern story might go like this: A father had two sons and they were out for a walk on a pathway beside a fast moving river. The younger son kept going down by the edge of the river to play, ignoring his father's command to get away from the edge because it was unsafe. The older son obediently stays by his father's side. Eventually, the son falls in the water and is quickly swept downstream, likely to his death. Does the father scream, I told you not to play there, you disobedient child? No, out of love he jumps immediately into the river to save his son, putting his own life in severe danger. This is the love of a father. The older son can just go home, or he can find a way to help. Perhaps this seems too simple. But Jesus was making it simple. Turn away from your selfishness. Confess your sins. I will rescue you from your sin. I will come and dine with you.

Joshua

In the Book of Joshua, we have another of those biblical expressions that is used badly. We might say that a person on a sports team or a business organization is going to take us to the promised land. By that, we mean that someone is going to finally bring success to the team or organization. In today's passage from the Book of Joshua we see how it is properly used. The Promised Land is literally the land

that God had promised Abraham centuries earlier. It was one of three promises: A people, a land, and a blessing to the nations. The people are there, just entering the land. The fulfillment of the third promise was still a long way off. That promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He became the new promised land. The manna stopped on the day the people entered the land because they would now eat the produce from the land. But Jesus would eventually become the new manna as food for our souls. The promised land wasn't a Stanley Cup. It was only the beginning of a life dedicated to God, which would ultimately be a relationship with God become man, a family relationship with God as our Father and Jesus as the perfect brother who makes it possible for us to come to our senses and return to the family of God.

2 Corinthians

St. Paul says that whoever is in Christ is a new creation. The old has passed away. Be reconciled with God. Make a resolution to go to confession. He made Christ to be sin who knew no sin.

Conclusion

During Lent, we pray, fast and give, in contradiction to the values of the world. The Father is always calling out to us, even when we go away from him by our sin. Do not live in fear. Choose joy. God's grace is enough for us.

Lent is a journey. It is OUR journey. The Church, which is Christ, gives it to us for our benefit. We have the Light of Christ to accompany us on walk, that journey, that pilgrimage. We go with Jesus into the desert. We hunger and thirst with him. We are tempted by the devil with him. In our suffering, Jesus will accompany us because he has gone before us Jesus' in his pain and agony in Gethsemane's Garden, and in carrying that rough and heavy cross, and in those nails.

With Easter around the corner, let us come to our senses and prepare what we will say to the Father who desires our true joy. It is never too late to get up and go back to the Father who loves us that much!

Key Verses Today

Entrance Antiphon: *Rejoice Jerusalem and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning.*

Collect: *O God, grant that the Christian people may hasten toward the solemn celebrations to come.*

Joshua: *The Lord said to Joshua: Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt. On the day after Passover on that very day, they ate the produce of the land. The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land.*

Psalm: *I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall be continually in my mouth. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Look to him and be radiant, so your faces shall never be ashamed.*

2 Corinthians: *Brothers and sisters, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away. See, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. So we are ambassadors for Christ. For our sake God made Christ to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God.*

Luke: *The Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he told them a parable, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me'. So the father divided his property between them. The young son travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything a severe famine took place and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. The young man would gladly have filled himself with what the pigs were eating. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough, but here I am dying of hunger! I will go to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him. Kill the fatted calf and let us eat and celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. Then the elder son became angry and refused to go in. His father pleaded with him. But he answered, 'For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command. Yet you have never give me even young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him. When the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life. He was lost and has been found.*