

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent - C  
Joshua 5:9a, 10-12;  
2 Corinthians 5:17-21;  
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32  
Little Flower - 3/10/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, we hear one of the best known and best loved parables of Jesus, the parable of the Prodigal Son. Some Scripture scholars, however, would argue that the title *Prodigal Son* is a misnomer. The parable would better be titled the parable of the Prodigal Father. Luke 15 is a collection of three parables of God's mercy or forgiveness. The word *prodigal* means *wastefully extravagant*. In this parable, the father is wastefully extravagant in forgiving his son.

We see two examples of the father's mercy or forgiveness in this parable. First, when the father saw his son coming, he "*was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.*" This was the son who had wasted his half of what had been his father's estate. The son had prepared a speech for his father. However, his father did not allow him to finish before he ordered the finest robe, a ring, and sandals to be placed on his son, the fatted calf to be killed, and a celebration to be held. I have to believe that the father saw his son while he was still far off because he was watching for him. He had already forgiven him, and in running to meet him, he took the initiative in welcoming him home. Second, when the older son would not join in the celebration out of resentment, the father reached out to him, inviting him to join the celebration. In other words, besides forgiving his younger son, the father took the initiative in reconciling the two brothers with each other.

Because of Christ's death on the cross once for all, we are already forgiven even before we sin. Think about what I just said: we are already forgiven even before we sin. In sending Christ into the world to free us from our sins, God has already taken the initiative to forgive us. For our part, all we have to do is to accept the forgiveness that God has already given.

Today, however, I would like to focus on the reading from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. First, Paul makes the same point that Jesus made in the parable of the Prodigal Father: God has taken the initiative in reconciling us to himself in Christ. However, Paul adds that God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation, making us ambassadors for Christ.

As ambassadors for Christ, then, we are called to proclaim God's message of forgiveness and reconciliation, and we are called to be healers and reconcilers. This calls to mind the beautiful Prayer of St. Francis: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, Where there is hatred, let me sow love; Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; Where there is sadness, joy."

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus challenges us to initiate reconciliation: "*Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift*" [5:23-24]. Jesus does not say, "If you have done something to your brother..." Rather, he says, "If your brother has anything against you..." In other words, it does not matter who started it or whose fault it is. He wants us to be instruments of reconciliation.

My brothers and sisters, when it comes to forgiveness and mercy, God is the prodigal Father. However, he wants us to be ambassadors of Christ, ambassadors of his forgiveness and reconciliation. "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."