

4th Sunday of Lent - C
Joshua 5:9a, 10-12;
II Corinthians 5:17-21;
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32
Little Flower - 3/27/22

My Brothers and Sisters,

Most of us know the parable in today's Gospel as the parable of the *Prodigal Son*. However, many of us probably do not know the meaning of the word *prodigal*. According to the dictionary, *prodigal* means "wastefully or recklessly extravagant." Many Scripture scholars tell us that *Prodigal Son* is a misnomer. In the context of the 15th chapter of Luke's Gospel, it is clear that the parable is more about the father than the son. It could be better titled the parable of the *Prodigal Father*, who is recklessly extravagant with his love and forgiveness.

All three readings today are about relationships. In today's second reading, St. Paul proclaims that "*whoever is in Christ is a new creation.*" Paul explains what this means when he writes that God "*has reconciled us to himself through Christ.*" If we are a new creation, it is, first of all, because of our relationship with God in Christ and then our relationships with others, the world, and ourselves. Sin, then, is anything that alienates us from God, others, the world, and ourselves.

St. Paul goes on to remind us that we are ambassadors for Christ. Jesus came to reconcile us with God, others, the world, and ourselves. As Christ's ambassadors, we are called to represent him to the world, which means we are called to be instruments of forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation in all that we say and do. We are called not to build walls and barriers but to tear them down and to build bridges.

That sin is about alienation and salvation is about reconciliation is consistent with what it means to be a human person. Persons are capable of relating consciously in knowledge and love. Therefore our four greatest personal needs are to know and to be known, to love and to be loved. In one word, our greatest personal need is intimacy with God and others.

In today's reading from Exodus, the Israelites finally arrive at the Promised Land and celebrate the Passover. It is not enough to live our relationships with God and others. We also need to celebrate them. When we celebrate them, we bring them to full consciousness and deepen and strengthen them. From time immemorial, people created religious rituals as a way to reach out and touch God. In instituting the seven sacraments, Jesus reversed the initiative. Sacraments are Christ's way to reach out and touch us. Rituals are also an important part of our most important relationships with others. We all know how important family and friend rituals are when it comes to birthdays and holidays.

The themes of alienation and reconciliation are at the heart of the parable of the *Prodigal Father*. In the first part of the parable, the younger son alienated himself from his family by asking for his inheritance and leaving home. We are told that he squandered his entire inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he returned home, his father welcomed him. However, his older brother alienated himself from his brother and his father because their father welcomed his brother home. Just as the father welcomed his younger son home, he took the initiative to reconcile the older brother with himself and with his brother.

My brothers and sisters, this parable offers us several insights into God's mercy and forgiveness. When we sin, we sometimes think God cannot or will not forgive us. Sometimes we believe we have to talk God into forgiving us. The father saw his son at a distance, was filled with compassion, and ran to embrace him. We never have to talk God into forgiving us. Because Christ died once for all, we are forgiven even before we sin. All we have to do is accept the forgiveness by being sorry for our sins and committing ourselves to trying to do better. Second, the final verse is important. The father said they had to celebrate because "*your brother was dead and has come to life again.*" As St. John says in his First Letter, those who are without love are among the living dead. When we are alienated from God, others, the world, or ourselves, we are among the living dead.