

Lent 4 Year C

Readings: *Joshua 5:9-12, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32, Ps. 32*

Theme: Reconciliation

"I will get up and go to my father and I will say to him 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and earth and before you' I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: **Amen.**

My dear friends, this is the fourth Sunday of Lent, which means that our journey is now more than half way. At this time of reconciliation, let us listen reflectively to the message of the Church to us today. What do the readings tell us about the theme of our reflection?

This Sunday is called Laetare Sunday-which means rejoice. If you look at the introductory sentence again you see that it begins with rejoice Jerusalem, rejoice with her. It is a special Sunday because the austerity of Lent is more than half way and there is cause for optimism. Even though Sundays are not included in the 40 days of fasting, this Sunday is a window in the austerity and since it is near the feast of Annunciation. It came to be known as Mothering Sunday. The prayer we have said after the Collect puts the whole thing in perspective. That said, lets us look at the readings this morning for hints for our reflection today and in the coming week.

The first reading from the book of Joshua is a narration of how God continued to provide for his people Israel until they were able to look after themselves.

Joshua was the successor of Moses; he brought Israel into the land promised to Abraham. The Passover which had begun their liberation was celebrated again. The name Jesus is a version of Joshua. It was at Passover that he died and gave us to eat not manna but his own body.

In the second reading, Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians reminds them of the privileges they have in Christ. The old life has been left behind and the new one in Christ has begun. God has taken the initiative and it was for man to respond. God and man are now reconciled. Christ is the medium of this reconciliation. Prior to Christ, the world was

in a state of enmity with God, his only response could have been that of anger because of the sin of man. But somehow the sinless one was made into sin, and its power was destroyed.

For Paul, Christians were the ambassadors of Christ

The Gospel is a familiar story. Jesus replies to his critics telling them the story of a man who had two sons. The second abandoned three aspects of his living by his family, his nation and his religion. He left his family to live away with foreigners. He spent all his money worked among pigs - a fact that he abandoned his religion.

This Gospel has been wrongly called the parable of the prodigal son. It should not have been called that because the son is not the hero - rather it should be called the parable of the loving father, for it tells us rather about a father's love than a son's sin. It tells us much about the forgiveness of God.

The father must have been watching and waiting for the son to come home. When he came, he forgave without recrimination.

The relationship between the son and the father is a reminder of how God takes the initiatives even when we have gone astray. For the Christian, there is a sure guarantee that God is always ready to open his hands just as the father did, not waiting for the son to pour out his soul. The intention to come back to the father was good enough.

This is the way it is with us as Christians. As the followers of Christ, we have an exemplar and our duty now as Paul said is to be ambassadors of Christ.

An ambassador for Britain is a Briton in a foreign land.

His life is spent among a people who usually speak a different language, who have a different tradition and who follow a different way of life.

The Christian is always like that. He lives in the world, he takes part in all the life and work of the world, but he is a citizen of heaven

To that extent, he is a stranger. The man who is not willing to be different cannot be a Christian at all.

An ambassador speaks for his country. When a British ambassador speaks, his voice is the voice of Britain.

There are times when a Christian has to speak for Christ. In his or her decisions and counsels of the world his must be the voice that brings the message of Christ to the human situation.

The ambassador acts as a representative of his sovereign. It is the ambassador's great responsibility to commend his country to the people among whom he is sent. This is the proud privilege and responsibility of

the Christian. The honour of Christ and his Church are in his/her hands. By his/her every word and action he can make men think more or less of his church and his master.

The message of Christ today for us is to appeal to a loving father who is prepared to look for us. Unlike the angry God of the old dispensation portrayed by the Pharisees, God is taking the initiatives. God holds no grudges. His power is in kindness and no sinner is ever written off or considered beyond redemption. While harsh judgements belong to this world, infinite compassion belongs to God who never gives up on his family.

The parable is a challenge to us to act like the father and let people see in our own lives something of what God is like.

This is what Paul means by seeing Christians as ambassadors.

Lord: the ideal is not always within easy reach, when we falter, extend your helping hand to us.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**