

Sunday, 14th Mar 2010 - 4th Sunday of Lent

"I will arise and go to my father"

Reading 1: Jos 5:9a, 10-12

Reading 2: 2 Cor 5:17-21

Responsorial Psalm : Ps 23: 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

Gospel : Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

Gospel Reading: *Luke 15:1-3, 11-32*

1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So he told them this parable:

11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons; 12 and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. 15 So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.'" 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; 23 and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; 24 for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry.

25 "Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

Meditation:

What's worst than being separated from one's loved ones, home, and friends? The pain of separation can only be surpassed by the joy of the homecoming and reunion. When God commanded his people to celebrate the Passover annually, he wanted them to never forget what he did for them when he freed them from slavery and death in Egypt and led them safely through the wilderness to their promised homeland. God desires that none of his children should be separated from their true homeland in heaven with him.

Jesus illustrates this passover from spiritual death to life and from the slavery of sin to freedom with the longest parable recorded in the gospels. What is the main point of Jesus' story about two ungrateful sons and their extravagant father? Is it the contrast between an obedient and a disobedient son? Or the reception given to a spendthrift son by the father and the reception given by the eldest son? Jesus does contrast the eldest son's cold and aloof reception for his errant brother with the father's rather lavish party and warm embrace for his repentant son. While the errant son had wasted his father's money, his father, nonetheless, maintained unbroken love for his son. The son, while he was away, learned a lot about himself. And he realized that his father had given him love which he had not returned. He had yet to learn about the depth of his father's love for him. His deep humiliation at finding himself obliged to feed on the husks of pigs and his reflection on all he had lost, led to his repentance and decision to declare himself guilty before his father. While he hoped for reconciliation with his father, he could not have imagined a full restoration of relationship. The father did not need to speak words of forgiveness to his son; his actions spoke more loudly and clearly! The beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet symbolize the new life – pure, worthy, and joyful – of anyone who returns to God.

The prodigal could not return to the garden of innocence, but he was welcomed and reinstated as a son. The errant son's dramatic change from grief and guilt to forgiveness and restoration express in picture-language the resurrection from the dead, a rebirth to new life from spiritual death. The parable also contrasts mercy and its opposite – unforgiveness. The father who had been wronged, was forgiving. But the eldest son, who had not been wronged, was unforgiving. His unforgiveness turns into contempt and pride. And his resentment leads to his isolation and estrangement from the community of forgiven sinners. In this parable Jesus gives a vivid picture of God and what God is like. God is truly kinder than us. He does not lose hope or give up when we stray. He rejoices in finding the lost and in welcoming them home. Do you know the joy of repentance and the restoration of relationship as a son or daughter of your heavenly Father?

Questions for Community Faith Sharing:

Am I like the prodigal son who feels that I am not worthy of the Father's love? Why?

What is stopping me from reconciling with my Father in Heaven?

Am I sometimes like the eldest son who is unforgiving to others even if I had not done anything wrong?

"Lord Jesus, may I never doubt your love nor take for granted the mercy you have shown to me. Fill me with your transforming love that I may be merciful as you are merciful."