

Fourth Sunday of Lent (Year C)

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

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 34: 2 - 3, 4 - 5, 6 - 7

Reading II: II Corinthians 5: 17 - 21

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

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

[Fourth Sunday of Lent | USCCB](#)



Return of the Prodigal Son
Rembrandt, 1669

The Fourth Sunday in Lent is known as Laetare (Rejoice) Sunday. It marks the mid-point in Lent (three weeks completed and three weeks remain). The priest has the option of wearing rose-colored vestment on this day to lift the somber feel of purple used during lent.

The readings also offer a message of hope. In Joshua, after traversing the desert for years, the people finally arrive in the Promised Land and have access to regular food. God provided the manna, which they ate during their journey, but now the journey was over, and they began to live as free people. They marked this transition by celebrating a Passover meal, a meal that expressed their identity as the people saved by God.

In the Letter to the Corinthians, Paul stresses that we also have a new identity as the people who Christ's death and resurrection have saved. Christians have become a new creation, no longer bound by selfishness and death but brought into a new life in Christ. This new life missions us to be an ambassador of Christ.

An ambassador represents and shares the message of the one whom he or she represents. When representing a country, one presents the concerns and values of that country. In representing Christ, one presents Christ in both one's words and deeds. One is no longer acting on one's own but is to act as Christ does.

For Paul, Christians are to be ministers of reconciliation. One brings the message of God's forgiveness and acceptance. It is not a matter of highlighting all the ways they have failed. Instead, the Christian message is about God's mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and love. This is the message that brings healing to the world.

The Gospel passage offers an example of the message. Jesus addresses the sinners and tax collectors, those who are the rejected of society. He presents a parable that holds many twists and surprises.

The younger son insults his father by effectively saying, I wish you were dead because I want your money. The fact that the father gives him his share of the estate is even more shocking. Thirdly, after spending the money, the son ends up tending pigs, the lowest work imaginable. When he returns, the father runs out to greet him, gives him a robe and sandals. He is part of the family again. A dinner for all is prepared. In this part of the story, the sinners and tax collectors recognize the reconciliation that Jesus offers. They, too, can experience God's welcome and forgiveness, for it is a gift and not something that they can earn.

The other son points to his obedience, similar to the Pharisees and the Scribes. They deserve God's favor because of what they have done. They have a sense of superiority over those who are sinners. They trust in their efforts and believe that God owes them something. Surprisingly, this is their sin. Those who have relied on their efforts have not received God's gift of forgiveness, nor have they loved their brother who has sinned. In refusing to go to the dinner, he excludes himself from his relationship with the father and brother.

The parable invites us to look within. Is one's relationship with God based on what I do, or is one's relationship with God based on what God is doing? St Paul makes a similar point: "All this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ." Our salvation, rebirth, and relationship with God are God's gifts. Our major choice is accepting God's gift or giving God the terms we demand.

Reflection Questions:

What is challenging for you about trusting God with your life and future?

Can you recognize ways in which you are like each son?

How are you an ambassador for Christ?

How is your Lenten journey going? Do you need to reevaluate or refocus in the coming weeks?

Themes

Trust in God

New creation

Repentance and forgiveness

Self-righteousness

Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that we may be ambassadors of Christ, bringing God's message of compassion, mercy, and salvation to all who are wounded or alienated

For the grace of freedom: that we may be bound by neither our sins nor our self-righteousness but be free to receive and celebrate God's goodness each day

For new understanding: that we may recognize that God's love for us is not based on our deeds or achievements but on God's free and generous choice

For young people who have run away from their families: that God will protect them from harm and give them the courage to make contact