

First reading Joshua 5:9a,10-12**The people of God entered the promised land and there kept the Passover.**

In those days: The Lord said to Joshua, 'Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.' While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

Responsorial Psalm 34(33):2-7 R cf 18b**Taste and see that the Lord is good.**

I will bless the Lord at all times,
praise of him is always in my mouth.
In the Lord my soul shall make its boast;
the humble shall hear and be glad.

Glorify the Lord with me;
together let us praise his name.
I sought the Lord, and he answered me;
from all my terrors he set me free.

Look towards him and be radiant;
let your faces not be abashed.
This lowly one called; the Lord heard,
and rescued him from all his distress.

Second reading 2 Corinthians 5:17-21**'God who through Christ reconciled us to himself.'**

Brothers and Sisters: If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ; God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Gospel Acclamation Luke 15:18**Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus.**

I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him,
'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.'

Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus.**Gospel Luke 15:1-3,11-22****'Your brother was dead, and is alive.'**

At that time: The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'

So he told them this parable: 'There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me." And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

'But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.' "

'And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 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." 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. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to celebrate.

'Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound." But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, "Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!" And he said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found." '

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Feast Days this Week

Wednesday 2nd April: St Francis of Paola

Friday 4th April: St Isidore

Saturday 3rd April: St Vincent Ferrer

Reflection on the Readings

The ideal short story

Luke 15 is a masterly story. Some of its phrases are so powerful that they have become proverbial. Prodigal Son, fatted calf. . . lost and found. A story that has enriched the vocabulary of the world. And not just the world's vocabulary " the world's mentality as well. Its way of looking at things. No story tells us more about God or makes us feel better about ourselves. It's a short story with enormous scope, with the widest possible diameter, in that it embraces our sinfulness at one end and God's forgiveness at the other. The best part of it, of course, is that it brings both extremities to the centre. What provoked it? What led Our Lord to tell it? The fact that the Pharisees objected to the company he kept, to his eating with sinners. So he tells the story to give an insight into his own mind and the mind of God.

It plays out in three vivid character sketches. First there is the younger son, an impatient lad who wanted his inheritance now. Couldn't wait for the father to die. Greedy fingers, itchy feet, a sensual nature; wanting to live it up, and to hell with the commandments. A life based on doing whatever he feel like doing " not an unfamiliar story, really. We make excuses: "Sure you might as well, while you're young. As long as you're enjoying yourself, and stay safe." But the happiness ran out, and he came to his senses. And that's the big point about him. He came to his senses. He really was repentant. Repentance is to be sorry to be in one place, to want to be in another, and to have the will and determination to get there. To be sorry for our sins, to want a different kind of life, and to have the motivation and determination to change. Well, he had that. He was graced with that. "I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired men" (Lk 17:19). As I say, the big thing about him is that he acknowledged his sins and wanted to be rid of them. He was really repentant.

The second character is the father, who was on the lookout for the son's return. "While he was still a long way off, his father saw him" (Lk 15-20). Still a long way off, a dot on the horizon. Doesn't that mean he was on the look.out for him, from the day he left, watching and waiting and praying, like many a father or mother? Doesn't it illustrate how God the Father feels about each of us, how much every one of us matters to him, how anxious he is that we'd come back? And he didn't just wait for the son; he ran out to meet him " met him half-way. Some people feel we should call this story "the Prodigal Father." To be prodigal is to be wasteful or lavish in your use of things. Well, the father threw his forgiveness around. Not in any grudging or reproving way, but in an explosion of sheer generosity and joy: Kill the calf, we're having a feast, the son is alive again. The father is noted for the prodigality of his forgiveness and the intensity of his joy: "There will be more rejoicing in Heaven over one sinner repenting than over ninety-nine upright people who have no need of repentance" (Lk 15:7).

The third character is the elder son, so angry that he couldn't enter into the mood of the party to celebrate his brother's return. He's indignant at his father's easy pardon of the returned prodigal, and refuses even to go in. Of course his anger is quite understandable and he's treated with some sympathy by his father, but the elder son's attitude helps to illustrate how much more forgiving God is than we are, and how inclusive, all-embracing, is the Father's embrace. It includes the two of them " the rock and the rover. "My son you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right that we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found." What a lesson for the Year of Mercy in which pope Francis has invited us to join.

The story of the Prodigal Son really needs no elaboration. The most respectful response to it is personal reflection. Just think about it; savour it and let it sink in. We'll all be touched by different pieces of it, because that's the way with everything we hear. I doubt if any of us can ignore its central message, that there is no limit to God's forgiveness and that our repentance brings joy to the Father's heart. You imagine that God doesn't want us to turn away from sin? You think God doesn't love you? Then you haven't been listening to the story of the Prodigal Son.

The Cycle of Prayer

Background

For those preparing to be initiated into the Church at Easter, Lent marks the final stage of preparation, the period of Purification and Enlightenment. It begins with the Rite of Election on the First Sunday of Lent. During the season of Lent the Scrutinies are celebrated on the 3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays in preparation for Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. Many parishes will also receive candidates for Reception into the Church.

“The people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized.”

“During Lent, the period of purification and enlightenment, the faithful should take care to participate in the rites of the scrutinies and presentations and give the elect the example of their own renewal in the spirit of penance, faith, and charity. At the Easter Vigil, they should attach great importance to renewing their own baptismal promises.” RCIA 9
The celebration of other Sacraments, such as Confirmation and First Holy Communion, will often take place within the Easter season so that candidates for these Sacraments will also be preparing in Lent. These candidates should also be remembered in the prayers of the community.

Prayer

*Father of love and power,
it is your will to establish everything in Christ
and to draw us into his all-embracing love.
Guide the elect of your Church:
strengthen them in their vocation,
build them into the kingdom of your Son,
and seal them with the Spirit of your promise.*

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults