

## Fourth Sunday of Lent



This Sunday's Gospel reading—the Parable of the Prodigal Son—resonates deeply with those of us who grew up in alcoholic or dysfunctional homes. Many of us spent years trying to earn love, approval, and security, only to find ourselves burdened with shame, perfectionism, and a deep fear of rejection. The Twelve Steps provide a framework for healing, much like the sacraments of the Church, allowing us to experience God's longing for our renewal and recovery. We turn first to Saint Paul's words in this Sunday's second reading:

*Whoever is in Christ is a new creation:  
the old things have passed away;  
behold, new things have come.  
And all this is from God,  
who has reconciled us to himself through Christ  
and given us the ministry of reconciliation,  
namely, God was reconciling the world to himself  
in Christ,  
not counting their trespasses against them  
and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

Steps One through Five mirror this passage. As we recognize the impact of our past and acknowledge our powerlessness over it, God can create something new within us. The pain and survival strategies that once defined us need not determine our future. Through a searching and fearless moral inventory and the healing power of sharing our wounds with God, ourselves, and another person, we step toward freedom.

Healing is often gradual, yet we do not have to wait for God to meet us. The Parable of the Prodigal Son tells of a younger son who, after squandering his inheritance in reckless living, reaches a breaking point and chooses to return to his father:

*Coming to his senses he thought,  
“How many of my father's hired workers  
have more than enough food to eat,  
but here am I, dying from hunger.  
I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to  
him,  
‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.  
I no longer deserve to be called your son;  
treat me as you would treat one of your hired  
workers.’”  
So he got up and went back to his father.  
While he was still a long way off,  
his father caught sight of him, and was filled with  
compassion.  
He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.*

## FYZWjcb Ei Yghcbg

This story beautifully portrays the Father's mercy, but it also reveals the struggle of the older son. Unlike the prodigal, who knew he was lost, the elder son believed he had done everything right—yet he was consumed by resentment and self-righteousness when his father welcomed the younger son home. Many adult children of dysfunctional homes relate to the older son, having spent years fulfilling obligations, avoiding mistakes, and striving to be "good enough," only to feel unseen or unappreciated.

Healing requires that we let go of both roles—the desperate prodigal and the hardened older son. We cannot earn our worth through performance, nor do we need to keep running from pain. Instead, we are invited to trust that God's love is not based on merit but is freely given.

The journey of recovery is a daily surrender to God's will. As *Alcoholics Anonymous* (p. 85) notes, "What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities. 'How can I best serve Thee—Thy will (not mine) be done.'"

By embracing God's mercy, we become free to extend that same grace to ourselves and others. We are not bound by the wounds of our past, nor must we live in resentment. Instead, we can step into the new life that Christ offers, living as true ambassadors of His healing and reconciliation.

- What old things have passed away as you have taken on the identity as a beloved child of God through your recovery? What new things have come?
- How do you relate to the characters in the Parable of the Prodigal Son?
- How do you maintain your spiritual condition and carry the vision of God's will into your daily activities?

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**First Reading:** Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

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

**Second Reading:** 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

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