

Fourth Sunday of Lent



This Sunday's Gospel reading is one that deeply resonates with the experience out of the darkness of addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments – the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Overlapped with the sacraments of the Church, the Twelve Steps provide a framework to experience how God longs for our return, renewal, and recovery. We first consider the words of Saint Paul 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 are summarized in this reading. As we realize our powerlessness and need for Christ, God may make a new creation of us. Reconciliation is made possible by the blood of Jesus, who calls us to pick up our cross as we make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. By sharing it with Him, ourselves, and another human being, the shame and sin left by the stain of our trespasses are removed.

Transformation may happen quickly or it may happen slowly. Either way, we do not have to wait for God to meet us along the way. The Parable of the Prodigal Son tells the account of a greedy son who asked his father for his inheritance and then squanders it on drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, and debauchery. Upon hitting rock bottom, the son decides to return to the father for help:

*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.*

This story captures the merciful love of the father and the saving grace received by the younger, prodigal son. However, it does not end there as Jesus remarks on the experience of the elder son. Filled with self-righteousness, the older son scorns at the idea of his father's acceptance of the prodigal, making a case for himself while pointing out the unfair nature of the father's embrace. Divine love tends to be unfair, yet we can be quick to point it out when it is not in our benefit.

While relating to the experience of the younger son, we must heed the warning and learn from the bitter angst of the older son. It is not uncommon for someone to recover from a seemingly hopeless condition then, months or years later, develop a tendency to resent those who have not yet "come to their senses."

Therefore, it is important for us to make a daily commitment to surrender ourselves to God's will and take on the compassionate attitude of the prodigal's father. 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.'"

Only through this understanding and the recognition that no human power can relieve us of lust addiction and sexual compulsions can we be *ambassadors for Christ*, as Saint Paul concludes in the second reading.

- 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