

Homily of Fourth Sunday of Lent Year C, 2022

Joshua 5:9, 10-12; Psalm 34:2-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

The Fourth Sunday of Lent is called *Laetare* Sunday (Sunday of Joy). *Laetare*, Latin, meaning 'Rejoice' is the first word of today's Mass first entrance antiphon, "Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast" (Isaiah 66:10-11). *Laetare* Sunday is a glimpse of the hope and joy that awaits us at Easter as we continue our Lenten journey.

On arrival in the Promised Land, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. Before the celebration of the feast of the Passover, God commanded Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise Israel... None of those born in the wilderness during the journey after the departure from Egypt were circumcised... When the circumcision of the entire nation was complete, they remained in camp where they were, until they recovered. Then the Lord said to Joshua: Today, I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you" (Joshua 5:1-9).

The circumcision is a sign of reconciliation with God. It made the entire nation new to celebrate the Passover and to settle in the Promised Land. The Israelites went through physical circumcision before the Passover and before they settled in the Promised Land. In the same way, we are required to go through spiritual circumcision, that is the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as we journey through the Lenten Season and as we prepare to celebrate Easter. If physical circumcision was capable of removing the "reproach of Egypt" and sanctify the nation of Israel; even more so the Sacrament of Reconciliation is capable of obtaining forgiveness and removing the reproach of our sins. The power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is as stated by St. Paul in the second reading: It makes us new creation in Christ, old things pass away, and new things come. St. Paul continues, "All this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation..." therefore, the ministry of reconciliation is God's creation, not the Church!

God said to Joshua, "Today, I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you." We stand on this word of God and pray that the same declaration is made on us. Let us present to God our various 'reproaches' inflicted on us by difficulties of life. We pray that God removes them as he removed that of the Israelites. Amen.

We have a lot to learn from the four individuals in the Gospel reading.

The servant is obviously hasty with his response to the enquiry of the older brother. The servant's emphasis on the slaughtering of the fattened calf did not help the matter. "Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf..." He was not asked about the fattened calf. Proverbs 10:19 says, "Where words are many sin is not wanting."

The older brother represents the Pharisees, the scribes and the chief priests who did not believe that there was hope of salvation for tax collectors, sinners, and the Gentiles. Like the older brother, they were "angry and refused to enter the house..." In our time, the older brother represents people who write off others. He is also an example of people who work very hard but are full of complaints, envy, resentment, anger, and grudges.

The prodigal son's father never gave up on the prodigal son. "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." He celebrated his son's return and restored him to his former princely position. He put on him the finest robe, which means restoring the son's royalty. He put a ring on his finger, which means renewing the father-son covenant broken by the son's departure. He put sandals on his feet, which means restoring the son's lost confidence. He granted his son unconditional forgiveness. God does not give up on us. He forgives us unconditionally when we make a true contrition. And Jesus teaches us, to forgive others as God forgives us (Luke 11:4).

The prodigal son represents the tax collectors, the sinners, and the Gentiles who came to believe in Jesus and followed him. The prodigal son's ability to come to his senses, rise above shame and guilt, and return to his father is very remarkable. A person can only be written off if the person writes off himself or herself. The prodigal son encourages and inspires us not to remain where we have fallen, or remain in the sin of the past, or the mistakes of the past, or the guilt of the past, or the wounds of the past, or the past setbacks.

We are in the Season of Grace. It is a time for spiritual circumcision. It is a time to come to our senses and rise up from where we have fallen. It is a time to return to God. It is a time to reconcile with fellow human beings. God's grace is sufficient for us (2 Corinthians 12:9). Amen.

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