

Homily of Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year C, 2025

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 word, meaning 'rejoice' is the first word of today's Mass entrance antiphon, "Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast" (Isaiah 66:10-11). In the past, the Lenten season used to be very austere. The Fourth Sunday of Lent, being a mid-way of the Lenten season, used to be a day to relax the austere practices and celebrate. *Laetare* Sunday foreshadows the hope and joy that await 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 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 cleansing and reconciliation with God. 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 sanctifying the entire nation; 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 St. Paul states in the second reading: It makes us new creatures 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 God makes the same declaration upon 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.

One more lesson from the first reading: "On the day after the Passover they ate of the produce of the land in the form of unleavened cakes and parched grain. On that same day after they ate of the produce of the land, the manna ceased. No longer was there manna for the Israelites, who [from] that year ate of the yield of the land of Canaan" (Joshua 5:11-12). This means that "manna" does not fall forever. Some children, some young people, some adults, some organizations, some countries, and some leaders lack this wisdom. The blessings, talents, time, opportunities, and resources God gives us must not be taken for granted or wasted but be well appropriated since at a certain time, "manna" will cease to fall.

We have a lot to learn from the four individuals in today's gospel reading.

The servant was hasty with his response to the question of the older brother. The servant's emphasis on the slaughtering of the fattened calf was a trigger and setting a fire. "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." St. James says, "The tongue is a fire" (James 3:6). We pray with Psalm 141:3, "Set a guard, Lord, before my mouth, keep watch over the door of my lips."

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

The father never gave up on his lost son. He celebrated his return and restored him to his former princely position. The finest robe means restoring his royalty. The ring on his finger means renewing the father-son covenant broken by the son's departure. Sandals on his feet 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 himself or herself off. The prodigal son encourages and inspires us not to remain where we have fallen or in our sin or guilt or wound or setback of the past. Jesus' rising after three falls as depicted in the Stations of the Cross teaches us that fall is not failure. Failure is the inability to rise when one falls.

The Lenten season of grace is a time for spiritual circumcision. It is a time to come to our senses and rise up from where we have fallen.

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