

Homily of Fourth Sunday of Lent Year C

As God planned it, the Israelites arrived in the land of Canaan (the promised land) about the same time of the year (the month of Nisan) they left Egypt. The month of Nisan is the first month of the Hebrew calendar. On arrival, the Israelites celebrated the Passover, a seven-day celebration. During the celebration, the Israelites ate the produce of the land of Canaan. With the produce of the land for their food, the manna ceased.

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 into 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..." The ministry of reconciliation is God's creation, not the Church!

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

Servant: It appears to me that the servant lacked control of his tongue. Perhaps, he should have only said to the older brother, "Your brother has returned and we are celebrating." Rather than, "Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf..." Proverbs 10:19 says, "Where words are many sin is not wanting."

Older brother: He seems to be an example of people who work very hard but are full of resentment, anger and grudges. "He became very angry and refused to enter the house..." He said, "Look, all these years I have served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf." It is better to do little happily than to do much with a lot of anger.

Father: His unconditional forgiveness of his prodigal son challenges us. He restored his son to his princely position unconditionally. 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. He put sandals on his feet, which means restoring the son's confidence. The father teaches us what unconditional forgiveness is about.

Prodigal son: His ability to come to his senses and rise above shame and guilt challenges us too. Let us not remain where we have fallen, or remain in the guilt of the past and wound of the past. Let us get up and go to the father for forgiveness, restoration and healing. Let us come to our senses.

The readings of today's Mass teach us that there is no sin that is beyond God's pardon, but we have to get up and go to God for spiritual circumcision (first reading), reconciliation (second reading), forgiveness, restoration and healing (Gospel).

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