

4th Sunday in Lent, Cycle C March 14, 2010

Readings: Joshua 5:9a, 10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Reconciliation, a Process

Last week, Father mentioned that he would be retiring in a few months and would no longer be our pastor. And I know that this is going to be very difficult for Father Zeke because he believes that we are such a holy parish. I know this because Father has often commented to me about the holiness of the members of Sacred Heart—he has said that we must be holy because so few feel that they need to come to confession.

This Thursday is our Lenten communal penance service at Sacred Heart. And, so, it is fitting that our readings this morning speak about the need for repentance, reconciliation, and purification. It is a process. It involves a journey, but at the end of the journey there is great joy if we end up at the right place.

In our first reading this morning, we hear about the joy of the Israelites who have finally finished their forty-year journey in the wilderness—and we complain about making sacrifices for forty *days*. God tells Joshua: ***“Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you.”*** God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt but made them wander for forty years because of their disobedience and grumbling. He wanted to cleanse their assembly of all those who were adult men when they left Egypt; to start with a clean slate. And in today’s reading, the people no longer eat manna, they now enjoy the fruits of the promised land.

Our journey through Lent is also a time for cleansing and purification, a time for reconciliation with God and with our neighbor. Today is *Laetare* Sunday. *Laetare* means rejoice, and we rejoice that we are halfway through our Lenten journey. We stop and rejoice, but we must remember to continue our journey for the remaining three weeks.

We recognize our sinfulness and repent, but our contrition is not yet perfect. Like the prodigal son, we recognize the love of God the Father and realize that we are not worthy to be called His children. The prodigal son composed and rehearsed his statement to his father: ***“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.”*** But when his father ran out to meet him, he could only say the first part, ***“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.”***, before his father interrupted him. His father did not plan on treating him like one of his hired workers. And God is waiting to run out to us and offer His forgiveness; He is just waiting for our repentance. He never stops loving us. He never stops treating us like His children.

The prodigal son’s father loves him the same as the day he left, but the son has caused damage to his personal situation by squandering his inheritance. He has also damaged the relationship with his brother. Our sins also have consequences. God may forgive and forget, but our sinful actions damage the Mystical Body of Christ. We are part of the Body of Christ. Our sins affect the entire Body, and so we need to reconcile not only with Jesus, the Head, but also with the other members of the Church, the Body.

We should spend our time on earth trying to reconcile ourselves both with God and with our neighbors to try to undo the damage our sins have caused. We do this through

our prayers, we do this by subjecting ourselves to sacrifices, such as fasting, that help to demonstrate our sorrow and remorse, and we do this most effectively by performing acts of charity. By our charitable actions we demonstrate and develop our love for God and for our neighbor and that is how the Body of Christ is healed. Lent is a time to focus on making things right; a reminder of what we should do the whole year through.

God corrected the unfaithfulness of the Israelites before they could enter the promised land by making them wander until those who had sinned died along the journey. We need to undo the damage of our sins before we can enter the promised land called heaven. It is good for us to undo the damage of our sins while we are still on our earthly journey, or we will have to undo it in purgatory. On earth we can pray, sacrifice, and perform acts of charity. In purgatory, we can no longer pray for ourselves and we can no longer perform acts of charity. The only option left for our purification once we get to purgatory is suffering, and from what the saints and visionaries have related to us, it is not a very pleasant experience at all.

St. Paul said in our 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.”***

Through baptism, we became new creations, children of a loving God. Take advantage of the ministry of reconciliation, the sacrament of Penance, as you continue on your Lenten journey. Start working now to complete your reconciliation while on your *earthly* journey. Reconcile yourself with God by reconciling yourself with your neighbor. Remember we pray: ***“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”*** And remember that Jesus said: ***“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”*** If we want reconciliation with God, if we want His forgiveness and mercy, let us first extend our forgiveness and mercy to those who have offended us.

Deacon Joe Hulway