

Read

Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

LIVING THE WORD

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 31, 2019



REFLECTION

The dutiful son is having none of the forgiveness his father offers to the prodigal son. Every day he struggles to help his father while his younger brother squandered his inheritance on gluttonous activities. We all stand in judgement of others from time to time. Its petty grip will leave us numb with anger and righteousness. We desire recognition for our duty, loyalty, and sacrifice. Yet Jesus requires a deeper commitment to love those who hurt us and to welcome those who have abandoned us. At some point, we could be the younger brother walking toward home, tail between our legs, begging for forgiveness. It is with humility and grace we can offer the same kind of unconditional love as the father in this profound Gospel passage. He says, "Now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found" (Luke 15:32). Celebrating the return of the repentant is our challenge for this week.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What is your definition of "fairness" or "justice"? Why do you hold this belief?
- ❖ In what areas of your life do you need to celebrate those who have wronged you?



ACTION

Notice the judgements you carry with you on a daily basis. Who is the focus of your judgement? Is it a younger sibling or classmate? As you pray this week, hold each of these people in prayer asking God to wash over your enemies with love and kindness. Pray for yourself that you may find patience, understanding, and a release from the grip of judgement.





March 31, 2019

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

LECTIONARY #33C

Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

The Gospel tells the familiar story of the prodigal son, which highlights the abundant mercy of the charitable, patient, loving father. This week's readings (especially the Gospel) focus on forgiveness of self, of others, and from our Heavenly Father who loves us unconditionally and who unceasingly provides for us.

Q FOCUS: *God is merciful and loving.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

This is the Fourth Week of Lent, meaning the finish line is near. The sacrificing and fasting and praying is almost over, right? Wrong. Lent may only be six weeks (forty-plus days) long, but it's supposed to leave a lasting mark upon us. We are building spiritual muscles during this season, and now that we're past the halfway point, we can pay even more attention to where we are struggling and where we are succeeding in our day-to-day spiritual growth. In Lent, we are meant to focus on our internal repentance and conversion so we can be made ready for Easter. Today's readings help us think about that as each reading explores the concept of sustained, abundant, life-changing forgiveness given to us from the Father.

Church Teaching Connection

"Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. For this reason conversion entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1440).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory.

Gospel

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So to them Jesus addressed this parable: "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine

struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. 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. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

The story of the prodigal son is arguably one of the most well-known and popular parables that Jesus ever told. It is a story that hits on a variety of themes that are relatable and important for us to reflect on, the most important of course being the nature of repentance and forgiveness. The youngest son goes to his father and asks for his inheritance. This is the youngest son essentially telling his father that he is worth more to him dead than alive, since inheritances aren't given until a loved one passes away.

► **What is the father's response to the youngest son's request?**

Perhaps the most interesting part of today's Gospel is when the Father willingly gives his youngest son half his money and lets him leave. He doesn't yell at him, punish him, force him to stay, or try to convince him that his plan is bad.

► **Why do you think that is? Why does the father let his son leave?**

When the son leaves, he immediately begins wasting what he has, living a life of frivolous spending and poor decisions.

► **What happens to the son during this time? What is his "big idea" when he realizes he is destitute, lonely, and far from home?**

The youngest son begins to formulate a plan: he will go work for his father (the same man he considered worthless except for his money). He will live as a servant and try to make right for the wrong he committed.

► **Think about your life. Has there ever been a time when you knew what you have done was not only wrong, but continued to hurt you even after you've done it? What was your response? How did you handle this situation? Do you think**

you would have the courage the youngest son had to go and ask for forgiveness?

This is perhaps the greatest quality the youngest son possesses: he knows he is wrong and wants to return to his father and make up for what he has done. This gives us an example of what we should do when we sin. We should not fear the Father. We should go back to the Father, beg forgiveness, and offer to make up for what we have done.

► **What is the father's response when he sees his son returning? What does it symbolize when the father runs to him and then throws him a party? Why is this such a significant moment?**

The father is overjoyed because his son has returned, so much so that he throws him a welcome home celebration to tell everyone about the wonderful news. The father instantly forgives his son. He instantly grants him mercy. The father won't even think of making his son a lowly servant; he welcomes him back into the family completely, because his abundant love for his son is overflowing.

► **Do you think this is how God sees us when we ask forgiveness for our sins?**

God always provides what we need, just as he provided food for the Israelites in the desert before they could reach the Promised Land. And in some instances, what we need is great mercy and forgiveness. This is how he draws us closer to his very heart and shows us his immense love. We are drawn back to him and welcomed home when we seek forgiveness for our wrongs committed against him.

► **What can you do to "return home" today? Do you need to go to confession? Is there something you are harboring internally that you need to ask forgiveness for and repent from?**

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 166.

When we offend God with our sins, it's as if we are leaving his home, just as the prodigal

son left with his father's money. We are wasteful in sin—we waste the gifts and the goodness God has given to us.

God pours out his abundant love, welcoming us and bringing us back into his heavenly family.

Act on the Word

As a practical way to show gratefulness for God's mercy, have the teens brainstorm a list of ways they can show gratitude to God by being kind to others in their life. Here's a list to help get them started:

- ✧ Volunteer to take on a sibling's chores for the evening, and ask for nothing in return.
- ✧ Write a letter to someone you care about, saying why you love that someone.
- ✧ Give an enemy (or someone you really don't like) three compliments throughout the course of a day.

Then have the young people spend some time in reflecting on a brief examination of conscience. Ask each teen to answer these three questions during this time of reflection (and then discussion, if they feel comfortable sharing with others):

- ✧ Have I done anything recently that has hurt my relationship with God? If so, what? (Be specific.)
- ✧ Am I sorry for what I've done? Why?
- ✧ What can I practically do to avoid committing this sin again?

Closing Prayer

Close the session with the Act of Contrition from the Sacrament of Reconciliation ("My God, I am sorry for my sins . . .") found in the Rite of Penance, 45.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends. If your parish will be celebrating the third scrutiny with those preparing for Baptism at the Easter Vigil, the Year A readings may be used. The handout and session for the Year A readings are found in the appendix of this book on pages 257–260.