

Reflection for the 4th Sunday of Lent, Cycle C

The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/033025.cfm>.

1st Reading: *Joshua 5:9a, 10–12*

As you will remember, Joshua was Moses' assistant. After Moses died, Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan into the Promised Land. Our story takes up at that point when the people are celebrating Passover, which they had been told to celebrate every year as a remembrance of their being brought out of Egypt. This is the first time they have eaten food other than the manna which God provided for them in their desert wanderings.

2nd Reading: *2 Corinthians 5:17–21*

This is an important handful of sentences. Paul is teaching that the Christian life is a life of ministry. He describes it as an extension of our Lord's ministry of reconciling the world to God. He calls us ambassadors for Christ, a concept that is rich with imagery.

Gospel: *Luke 15:1–3, 11–32*

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. Lk 15:22-24

Gospel Reflection

When we were kids, my brothers hated me. That's not completely true but I was definitely the preferred child and they didn't like that; I was just cuter than them.

That's not true either; my blond-haired brother was the best looking. But I was my mom's baby. I don't think she stopped introducing me as her baby until the day she died. And that gave me certain privileges. I might do something wrong and one of my brothers would get blamed. If they protested that they didn't do it they were confronted with the words "You're supposed to be a good example for him." Yes, I gloried in that and didn't waste energy feeling bad for them.

My mom has always been my God concept, not for the way she treated my brothers, but for the way she treated me. I still remember sitting in her lap. She was a bit chubby and I remember how comfortable she was. Hugging her was similar to, but way better than, hugging my cuddly teddy bear. Her warmth is what I feel from God.

Today's Gospel selection is all about that. It's about the love the father had for the son who disrespected him. It is how the father was looking for him every minute of every day and saw him coming from afar off. It's about the embrace and treating the son like a prince and celebrating his existence.

It's also about the love the father had for the older son, the rule follower that expected his rule following would earn him special treatment. But the father wasn't about that. He loved his son just because he was and opened everything he had to his son if his son could accept that.

In both instances, the ability to experience the father's love was based on the sons' ability to open themselves to it. That begs the question: "What is preventing us from opening ourselves to the love of the father?" How do we try to manipulate the father to gain our understanding of what will make us happy? Remember, the younger son's manipulation was "Prove your love by giving me what you promised"; and, the older son's manipulation was "I'm following your rules now you have to repay me."

This parable shouldn't be called the Parable of the Prodigal Son and it shouldn't be called the Parable of the Two Sons. It should be called the Parable of the Loving Father.

What will it take for us to simply sit back and experience the Father's love for us. I'd like to suggest that it is in living the Law of Love that is the experience of God's love for us. We might think it is like doing something, this loving the other. But I think it is more like sitting back and enjoying the other. And in the act of enjoying the other, we experience the God who is love.

God is even more cuddly than my mom.

God bless...

Personal Reflection:

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. Lk 15:22-24

Question:

What words or phrases attracted your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they attracted your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Share about/Reflect upon a time when someone went out of their way to do something special for you that you didn't earn, or maybe even didn't deserve. Were they paying you back for something or, were they just being an instance of God's love? What is the proper way to respond to that love?

Verse by Verse:

Lk 15:12b "Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me." | The eldest son typically received twice what was given to other sons and, also, received responsibility for running the family. In this case, the younger son would have received one-third. It was acceptable for the property to be divided up before the death of the father, but not recommended.

Lk 15:13b "...set off to a distant country..." | AYBC states that he was within his rights to do this. I believe it was common, though, for younger sons to stay and use their resources for the advancement of the family.

Lk 15:13c "...squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation." | Even though the father gave this son his inheritance early, the father was expected to be able to live off of the proceeds of that property. The son not only squandered what was his but what was his father's as well.

Lk 15:15b "...sent him to his farm to tend the swine." | Remember that pork was considered ritually unclean for Jewish people. He is now making his living off of that which is considered unclean and forbidden by his people.

Lk 15:17a : "Coming to his senses..." | The Greek is more literally translated "Having come to himself...". It seems to imply coming to a depth of understanding of himself and the life situation he has created for himself.

Lk 15:18b "...I have sinned against heaven and against you." | Our sins are not only against God but usually have a negative effect on others, also.

Lk 15:19a "I no longer deserve to be called your son..." | After receiving the property coming to him, the son had no legal rights with regard to his father. Also, after acting out as he did, the son could no longer claim respect as the father's son.

Lk 15:19b "...treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers." | This sets us up to realize that God always treats us as a son or daughter, no matter what.

Lk 15:20b "...While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him..." | This statement implies that his father was constantly looking for him to return.

Lk 15:20c "...filled with compassion..." | The Greek can be translated a variety of ways; pity, compassion, affection, etc. I take it to include the concept of understanding and the acceptance of the other which flows from that.

Lk 15:22 "...bring the finest robe and put it on him..." | Not only did his father accept him, he treated him as an extremely important person.

Lk 15:24a "...was dead, and has come to life again..." | This reminds me of the sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation.

Lk 15:28 "...he refused to enter the house..." | This sets up a compare-and-contrast between the two sons.

Lk 15:29c "...not once did I disobey your orders..." | The older son's relationship with the father is legalistic.

Lk 15:30a "...when your son returns..." | This should probably be taken in the sense of "when that son of yours returns". It shows the disdain of the elder brother who cannot call his brother "brother".

Lk 15:31b "...everything I have is yours." | The implication is that the older son could have done whatever he wanted and would have been supported by his father.

Lk 14:32a "...we must celebrate and rejoice." | We should celebrate with God, no matter how we felt about our past with him and/or the other person.

Lk 14:32b "...your brother was dead..." | In sharp contrast to the older brother's refusal to call the younger son his brother, the father drives the point home that it is his brother who has returned.