



# Bringing Home the Word

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
March 3, 2019

## Recognizing the Truth That Is in Our Hearts

By Hans Christoffersen

Our words and deeds say much about who we are, not only on the surface, but in our hearts. Carelessness in our words and actions can indicate a careless, unconcerned heart. A careless heart easily finds faults in others while remaining blind to its own failings. Jesus calls people with such attitudes “hypocrites.” *Hypocrisy* is a Greek word meaning “play acting,” that is, passing oneself off as someone other than who one really is.

To be real is to have a heart that

recognizes and accepts the truth about oneself. This is a humble, down-to-earth heart (*humility* is from the Latin “of the earth”), and close enough to ourselves to see our failings and limitations.

Do we know our own hearts? What fills our hearts: censure, criticism, judgment—or the goodness and humility that makes us realize we hardly know enough to judge anyone?

The gift of humility, then, is the way that we know our common bond in Christ and sustain the Church community. This happens in our prayer, but also in situations seemingly removed from pious intent. Some years ago, an American family vacationing in Italy lost their only son in a traffic accident. The parents decided to donate his organs, and their decision to have his organs live on in Italy received great attention in a nation where, until then, organ donation was very unusual.

Our Scriptures today tell us that these kinds of words and deeds say a lot about who we are—not on the surface, but in our hearts. If God, who is down-to-earth, is our focus, we will see how goodness is the fruit of his humble love: “Therefore, my beloved...be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58). +

## A Word from Pope Francis

When we go to Mass, perhaps we arrive five minutes early and begin to chat with the person next to us. But this is not the moment for small talk.... It is the moment for recollection within the heart, to prepare ourselves for the encounter with Jesus. Silence is so important!

—General audience,  
November 15, 2017



## Sunday Readings

### Sirach 27:4-7

When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear; so do people’s faults when they speak....The test of a person is in conversation.

### 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?

### Luke 6:39-45

[Jesus said,] “Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?”

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- This week, can I meditate on what is truly in my heart?
- Is the goodness in my heart expressed in words and deeds?

# The Good Businessman



By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce

“A businessman was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho for work when he encountered someone who had been mugged.” This might have been the opening to Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37.

Yes, the hero was a Samaritan, the most hated ethnic group in Israel at the time. And yes, he was a layperson—not a priest or a Levite like the other two travelers on the road. Both of these facts about the main character are important story elements because Jesus was clearly trying to get his listeners to think outside the box.

Remember, this parable was Jesus’ response to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” When Jesus told a story about the member of a despised minority who was more kind and generous than the

Jewish priestly class, he was intending to provoke an audience reaction.

But it’s also possible that Jesus was using a person in the midst of his daily work to demonstrate what it means to love our neighbor. It’s not a big stretch to imagine the hero as a businessman. He is traveling alone on a dangerous stretch of road. He has a donkey and happens to be carrying olive oil and wine. He also has enough money to pay an innkeeper to take care of the man and promises that he will return soon. This certainly sounds like a person on the first leg of a business trip. Perhaps he was a dealer in olive oil or wine.

## Values in the Workplace

In any case, the good Samaritan was most likely “at work” when he did his “good Samaritan-ing.” That is, he was probably on the job when he was called upon to help someone less fortunate than himself.

Work and the workplace in our culture are given a bum rap. The workplace is often portrayed as an awful setting where people constantly put others down, where competition is exclusively and excessively rewarded, where dog eats dog, and only the strong survive. Many assume there is little time in the midst of work for things like compassion, generosity, or going out of your way for others as the Samaritan did.

In many ways, work deserves some of this criticism. We often lose our focus on what is truly important in life as we strive to succeed in our careers. We get so preoccupied with the bottom line, the next promotion, getting a leg up, that we forget people are more important than profits, prestige, or power. We forget that

we are but stewards of resources we have been given.

## Loving Thy Neighbor

The good Samaritan recognized all that, however, and did so in the midst of going about his business. He was on the road that morning precisely because he was working, but he kept his perspective even amid the hustle and bustle of his daily work. He encountered somebody who needed assistance. He stopped. He helped to the extent he could, given his time and resources. He then went about his business, returning later to see how things were going.

It’s precisely that kind of openness that Jesus is asking of us. When asked to identify what he meant by a neighbor, Jesus described a regular guy going about his daily work who somehow had time to love someone who needed help.

“Go and do the same,” Jesus told all of us, no matter what our occupation might be. That good businessman—in the midst of doing his own job and using resources from his own workplace—was Jesus’ example of what “love thy neighbor” looks like. +



*Lord, you show me the pathway  
of goodness and truth.  
Help me to bear the fruit of love,  
compassion, and peace.*

—From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day  
in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage  
and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

March 4-9

**Monday**, Weekday: Sir 17:20–24 /  
Mk 10:17–27

**Tuesday**, Weekday: Sir 35:1–12 /  
Mk 10:28–31

**Wednesday**, Ash Wednesday: Jl 2:12–18 /  
2 Cor 5:20–6:2 / Mt 6:1–6, 16–18

**Thursday**, Thursday after Ash Wednesday:  
Dt 30:15–20 / Lk 9:22–25

**Friday**, Friday after Ash Wednesday:  
Is 58:1–9a / Mt 9:14–15

**Saturday**, Saturday after Ash Wednesday:  
Is 58:9b–14 / Lk 5:27–32

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# Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Lent  
March 10, 2019

## Jesus Is Our Example for Resisting Temptation

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When I was on a pilgrimage to Israel, we visited Masada, the last stronghold of the Jews after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. The temperature hit 117 degrees the day we came. We wandered around and wondered what it must have been like to hold out for a long time. When we returned to our bus, we couldn't wait to get to the cold water that awaited us. The priest said, "The Jews were in the desert for forty years; Jesus was in the desert for forty days; you've been in the desert for forty minutes. Think about that."

### Sunday Readings

#### Deuteronomy 26:4-10

The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders.

#### Romans 10:8-13

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

#### Luke 4:1-13

When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

I have no doubt that Jesus was tempted to give himself food and water when he was enduring the desert heat. I have no doubt that in his agony he might also have thought about seizing power for himself. These are the things that tempt us when we are worn out, beaten down, or simply think we are not getting enough of what we believe we deserve.

Lent begins with the temptation of Jesus. Like us in all things but sin, he knew about being and feeling deprived and weak. And while his temptations came while he was in an actual desert, our harsh and barren places may be physical, psychological, or spiritual. We may feel lost, alone, helpless, and sometimes hopeless. In our times of weakness, evil can find a foothold and convince us that we must control our lives, that we can and should have whatever we want. In this account, we find in Jesus an example of how to resist temptation—patiently, humbly, with trust in God's promise of salvation. +

*Our harsh and barren places may be physical, psychological, or spiritual.*

## A Word from Pope Francis

The devil wants you to quarrel among yourselves, because in this way he divides you, he defeats you, and he robs you of faith. Therefore, solidarity among brothers and sisters to defend the faith!...Go forward and don't let the devil divide you!

—Visit to Bañado Norte, Paraguay, February 19, 2017



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- When do I feel tempted by the enemy of my soul?
- How can I rely on God to overcome those temptations?

# Finding Our Way Home



By Joyce Rupp

*"Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep" (Luke 15:6).*

Recently I received a photo from friends visiting Ireland. It shows a sheep grazing on a green hillside near a serene cottage. The sheep has a large red splotch of paint on its woolly side, a mark of the farmer's ownership so the sheep can be reclaimed if it wanders.

We also are marked, not with paint but by the compassionate care of the Good Shepherd. No matter how we traverse off the spiritual path, we will be found and reclaimed. We can count on the Good Shepherd to care about us and continue urging us homeward.

There are as many ways to stray as there are sheep in a flock. Sometimes sheep stray on purpose, lured by a false

desire to find something tastier than in the place they now have. At other times they stray by accident, so focused on their munching that they forget to look where they are going.

The same is true of us. Not every straying is sinful. We can lose our spiritual awareness when overcome with busyness, grief, depression, or abuse. Difficult economic times can lead to anxiety and away from our Peacemaker. We can lose ourselves in wanting the ideal family, the perfect situation. We can wander off in the false hope of never having enough, always seeking more.

We can also lose our way on purpose, giving in to sinful choices and selfish endeavors, allowing our ego satisfactions to create havoc with our relationships. We can stray into the land of jealousy, anger, hatred, prejudice, and other pastures that steer us away from the Good Shepherd's land.

## The Good Shepherd and His Helpers

Like a farmer with his wandering sheep, the Good Shepherd looks for us when we've strayed. The Good Shepherd might come as a voice within us, reminding us who we're meant to be and how far we've drifted. Maybe we're called home by a sense of how we need to change, to return to that part of us that has been swept away by laziness, ego, or arrogance. Or the Shepherd might be an encouraging reminder of the beauty within us that we've forgotten in our daily pursuit of duties and obligations.

Sometimes the Shepherd sends a helper to bring back the beloved creature. We can be found through the aid of

others. We find our way home when another forgives us for our foolishness or wrongdoing, embraces us in our grief or desperation, urges us to resume living in a loving way, or reminds us of our self-worth and purpose in life.

Being found can bring a sigh of relief that we are back safely on the path that leads to greater harmony with the Good Shepherd. But there are times when being found doesn't feel so great. We feel irritated and challenged because we'd rather stay and chew the green grass of our isolation and selfishness than come home to the possibility of change.

## Homeward Bound

Lent is a time to be found, to come home. We need to take a look around the countryside of our hearts and see how we've wandered away from the Good Shepherd, either purposely or by accident. We might also reflect on how we can be instruments of the Good Shepherd, reaching out and helping others find that lost part of themselves.

Let us call on the compassionate and devotional love of the Good Shepherd to bring what is lost in us, and in others, back home again. +

  
**PRAYER**

*Lord, give me the courage to accept the painful, ugly realities of life and become your advocate of truth and justice in the world.*

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

March 11-16

**Monday**, Lenten Weekday:  
Lv 19:1–2, 11–18 / Mt 25:31–46  
**Tuesday**, Lenten Weekday:  
Is 55:10–11 / Mt 6:7–15  
**Wednesday**, Lenten Weekday:  
Jon 3:1–10 / Lk 11:29–32

**Thursday**, Lenten Weekday:  
Est C:12, 14–16, 23–25 / Mt 7:7–12  
**Friday**, Lenten Weekday:  
Ez 18:21–28 / Mt 5:20–26  
**Saturday**, Lenten Weekday:  
Dt 26:16–19 / Mt 5:43–48

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# Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Lent  
March 17, 2019

## Accepting Jesus' Challenge

By Mary Katharine Deeley

From the top of Mount Tabor in Israel, the supposed site of Jesus' transfiguration, visitors can see clearly across the valley to the distant Golan Heights. The view takes your breath away. When I was in the valley, I could only see the immediate area, but at the top both the distance and the beauty of the land mesmerized me.

Maybe that's why mountains have always been places of prayer, of divine unveiling, and why Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to the top of a mountain to experience this vision of his glory. He wanted them to see more than

their daily life and work. He wanted them to see further than they ever thought they could. He wanted them to see the depths of who he was in a new and profound way. It was important that they do this. The transfiguration happens in the midst of Jesus' predictions of his passion and death, before he begins his deliberate journey to Jerusalem. Without an image of the glorified Christ, the apostles might not have had the courage to continue following him.

Like the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert, we hear this transfiguration account every Lent. Jesus takes the Church, and each one of us, up the mountain and dares us to see further, better, more deeply than ever before. Through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, he dares us to leave what we know, listen to him, and follow in his footsteps. May we have the courage to accept the challenge. +

## Sunday Readings

**Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18**

Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so, [God] added, will your descendants be.

**Philippians 3:17-4:1 or  
Philippians 3:20-4:1**

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Luke 9:28b-36**

While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white.

*During Lent, Jesus takes each of us up the mountain, daring us to see further than ever before.*

## A Word from Pope Francis

At the end of the stunning experience of the transfiguration, the disciples came down the mountain with eyes and hearts transfigured by their encounter with the Lord. It is the journey that we too can make....Transformed by Christ's presence...we will be a concrete sign of the invigorating love of God.

—Angelus,  
August 6, 2017



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How can I use the Lenten season to transfigure my life and grow closer to God?
- Do I have the courage to change bad habits so as to follow more closely in Jesus' footsteps?



# Are We There Yet?

By Kathryn Begnaud

We've taken umpteen road trips with our five boys when they were young. The question most heard on those trips is the title of this article. They just wanted to get there.

That sentiment best describes my attitude toward Lent; my eagerness to jump ahead to Holy Week often results in wearing blinders for six weeks as my eyes constantly search over the next hill for Jerusalem. I'm resistant to the wearing of purple and often want to eat dessert first.

## On the Road

I imagine Jesus and his followers drawing nearer to Jerusalem—taking turns walking next to him, getting better acquainted, reminiscing, and sharing food. I suspect that, as they lifted their eyes when crossing each hilltop, some pointed to the horizon: “I see Jerusalem, our destiny!”

As they approached the city, they were undoubtedly filled with anticipation. Was there also foreboding? Did they ask plaintively, “Are we there yet?” When some complained of exhaustion, did Jesus place his hand upon their backs and whisper, “I will give you rest. Trust me. I have called you and I love you?”

I heard those very words whispered

to my battered soul when I first “visited Jerusalem”—a trip taken to deal with my father's alcoholism, but one that, instead, taught me all of life is Lenten. For months I prepared for the “journey” by planning a family intervention. I drew near through prayer, by reading about alcoholism, and by talking with experts I believed knew the only fail-proof route.

I fantasized that my experience would mirror others' success. There's the rub! Expecting to encounter God precisely as others have is a trap. We must each walk the journey with our own feet.

Haven't there been times in our lives that we've listened so intently to others' experiences of God that we've become disappointed in our own? Have we allowed the joyful stories of others to become a condition by which we measure the validity of God's presence? Though we are communal, we also walk individually with Jesus. While side-by-side, we are all still approaching, still drawing near.

## Broken and Mended

My own family intervention was a disaster, partly because I had so closely studied others' tales of Jerusalem that, confident of the route, I raced ahead of Jesus. My family hadn't the chance yet to draw near. They hadn't even known there was a map. They were being yanked through the city gates, and I was doing the yanking, not God.

At the time, I turned to Jesus and said, “If I'd known it would be this painful, I wouldn't have followed you here.” Many times I wanted to turn back, but I couldn't remember the return path. I couldn't unsee what I had seen. I couldn't unlearn new wisdom.

Exhausted, I decided to start over and, instead of hurling blame on my poor father, I began loving him—pure love: nothing more, nothing less. In short, I followed Jesus. I secretly reasoned that things couldn't get much worse anyway, and even with that attitude, the Lord still took me along.

## Drawing Near

It has been nearly thirty years since my first true Lenten experience, and today my family is healthy and whole. My father, whose sobriety is regarded as a gift, has become our spiritual leader.

Drawing near to Lent is always a journey of truth, and the truth is always about us. It's the most grueling journey of our lifetimes, but it's also the most exhilarating. My only advice is to enter in. Draw near. God is calling. +



*Lord, you desire to be with me and walk with me along life's journey. Awaken in my heart a desire and commitment to be with you in prayer.*

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

March 18-23

**Monday**, Lenten Weekday:

Dn 9:4b–10 / Lk 6:36–38

**Tuesday**, St. Joseph: 2 Sm 7:4–5a, 12–14a, 16 /

Rom 4:13, 16–18, 22 / Mt 1:16, 18–21, 24a or

Lk 2:41–51a

**Wednesday**, Lenten Weekday:

Jer 18:18–20 / Mt 20:17–28

**Thursday**, Lenten Weekday:

Jer 17:5–10 / Lk 16:19–31

**Friday**, Lenten Weekday: Gn 37:3–4, 12–13a, 7b–28a / Mt 21:33–43, 45–46

**Saturday**, Lenten Weekday:

Mi 7:14–15, 18–20 / Lk 15:1–3, 11–32



# Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Lent  
March 24, 2019

## Finding Humility

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Now that I'm older, I can look back on my life and clearly remember times when I took great pride in my accomplishments, the breadth of my knowledge, and my insight into human dynamics. The problem was that my pride bordered on, and occasionally slipped into, a sense of superiority and hubris. At such times I was not fun to be around. The advantage of maturity is that we become more aware of our shortcomings and, hopefully, develop a humility that appreciates the gifts that everyone brings to the table, recognizes that we always have more to learn, and

grows grateful, rather than prideful, at the gifts we have been given.

In today's Gospel, Jesus challenges the sense of pride that the Israelites feel from God's choosing them and the sense that they are, therefore, better than the people of the surrounding nations. He also questions their habit of judging those on whom misfortune fell as more sinful than they were. In a way, he was asking them to grow up and find the humility that comes from age, holding them to the same standard with which they held others. He challenged them to spend less time judging others and more time recognizing their sins and need for repentance.

That's a hard lesson for us all, but a necessary one. If we are to accompany one another on this journey through Lent and life, we need to know we are all the same in God's eyes and all in need of God's grace to make it through. +

## Sunday Readings

### Exodus 3:1–8a, 13–15

God replied to Moses: "...This is what you will tell the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.

### 1 Corinthians 10:1–6, 10–12

These things happened to them as an example, and they have been written down as a warning to us.

### Luke 13:1–9

"Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future."

*My pride bordered on  
a sense of superiority  
and hubris. At such times  
I was not fun to be around.*

## A Word from Pope Francis

Gathered before Jesus crucified, we hear his words ring out also for us: "I thirst" (John 19:28)...What does the Lord thirst for? Certainly for water, that element essential for life. But above all for love....He thirsts to give us the living waters of his love, but also to receive our love.

—Visit to Assisi,  
September 20, 2016



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- When blessed by good fortune, do I give credit where it is due—on God's grace?
- Rather than feeling superior for my earthly blessings, am I mindful that we're all the same in God's eyes?

# The Heart of the Sower



By Joyce Rupp

“A sower went out to sow”  
(Mark 4:3).

Parables, like dreams, have many layers of meaning. They teach us and stretch us into further growth. In one parable Jesus describes how a sower scatters seeds in hope of a harvest, but only the seed that lands on good soil thrives. The rest wither or sprout because they fall on rocks, grow in weedy soil, are trampled, or are quickly devoured by birds. Jesus explains how this is a metaphor for accepting, or not accepting, the Word of God in his listeners' lives.

We are told what happens to the seeds, but what about the sower? What does

the sower experience when seeds, strewn with hope, do not grow? When a field is ready for planting, the farmer feels expectant eagerness, a readiness to spend long hours of work planting, because each seed holds a promise of growth.

When seeds are poor and grow weakly, when hail or windstorms destroy the growing crop, when sun and drought wither it, the farmer often grows discouraged. Did Jesus, the Divine Sower, also feel this when he served his people? Did he feel pained and disheartened when he saw how little effect his message had on their lives, or did he maintain hope in spite of mixed results?

The gospels tell us that Jesus felt disheartened at the lack of receptivity and the failure of his message to change lives, but the Scriptures also remind us that he never quit. Jesus continued to believe in the possibility of change and growth in everyone. He did not withhold his love and openness to the “seeds” that fell on the wayside, or the rocky, weedy soil.

## Untested Soil

We're also sowers of seed. Each of us spreads the gospel message of faith and love by how we live our lives. Being a sower of God's goodness can be joyful when we see positive results from what we've planted. Our hearts flood with happiness and satisfaction when the seeds grow well.

Like Jesus, we also encounter defeat as we plant the seeds of his message. Faith-filled parents with love for their children see them choosing a life of drugs, violence, and immorality. Pastoral teams experience the apathy of parishioners toward faith-formation

programs. Seeds of marital faithfulness are destroyed by the rocky soil of adultery or the arid refusal to communicate. Teachers promoting honesty and integrity may find their efforts falling on the stony indifference and hostility of their students. People trying to plant seeds of harmony in their workplaces and communities may watch the seeds fail to develop.

## Hope in the Harvest

It takes faith and relentless hope to be a sower of the Word of God, to be untiring in accepting and caring about others. It requires resolve and continual prayer. Like Jesus, we may not see the harvest in our lifetimes but we cannot give up trying to live in God's kingdom as faithful, compassionate people. Steadfast hope is a vital component of a sower's heart.

As we live in the spirit of the Divine Sower this Lent, let us keep on sowing the seeds of our good works without giving in to discouragement. Let us sow with confidence, letting go of our expectations for immediate results. Let us trust that the Word of God will take deep root in our own hearts as well as in those with whom we live and work. +

PRAYER

*Lord, you are patient with me and never withhold your love and mercy from me. Strengthen me with your grace to become fully human, fully alive in the world.*

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

March 25-30

**Monday**, Annunciation of the Lord:

Is 7:10–14; 8:10 / Heb 10:4–10 / Lk 1:26–38

**Tuesday**, Lenten Weekday:

Dn 3:25, 34–43 / Mt 18:21–35

**Wednesday**, Lenten Weekday:

Dt 4:1, 5–9 / Mt 5:17–19

**Thursday**, Lenten Weekday:


Jer 7:23–28 / Lk 11:14–23

**Friday**, Lenten Weekday:

Hos 14:2–10 / Mk 12:28–34

**Saturday**, Lenten Weekday:

Hos 6:1–6 / Lk 18:9–14

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# Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Lent  
March 31, 2019

## God's Extravagant Love for All of His People

By Mary Katharine Deeley

One of the deep meanings of this Gospel reading is signaled in verse 2: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Last Sunday, Jesus challenged the people to realize they were no better than those they condemned. The Pharisees and scribes had trouble with that lesson. They felt morally superior and more entitled to God's favor than those whose lives they questioned. Jesus turned that attitude on its head, showing time and again that God seeks out the sinner and the lost, particularly those who recognize that they are sinners

and lost. As long as the Pharisees and scribes did not see themselves that way, Jesus could not help them.

*Dictionary.com Unabridged* says *prodigal* means "wastefully or recklessly extravagant," so someone who is prodigal is lavish, a spendthrift. According to the Pharisees, Jesus was prodigal, for they considered his welcome of sinners as wildly wasteful, frittering away time and resources on people they thought were unworthy. But Jesus simply was showing them, and all of us, what God's love is like. God is extravagant in his love for saints and sinners alike. To some it might seem pointless or unjust to love and care for sinners and enemies, but God finds no one unworthy or unlovable—even those who reject him and oppress others.

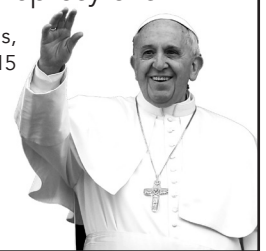
Lent is a time to accept our sinfulness, our lost condition, and return home to the Father. Like the father of the prodigal son, God waits for that warm embrace, willing to give us everything. Hurry! +

***God finds no one unworthy or unlovable—even those who reject him and oppress others.***

## A Word from Pope Francis

Jesus takes from us our diseased humanity and we take from him his sound and healing humanity. This happens each time we receive a sacrament with faith: the Lord Jesus "touches" us and grants us his grace....We think especially of the sacrament of reconciliation, which heals us from the leprosy of sin.

—Angelus, February 15, 2015



## Sunday Readings

### Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

...The LORD said to Joshua: Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you.

### 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us.

### Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

[Jesus said,] "Now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found."

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Do I give thanks that God finds no one unworthy or unlovable—even me?
- Am I making the most of this Lenten season to return to God's warm embrace?

# Lost and Found



By Richard Rohr, OFM

Of all Jesus' parables, the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is perhaps the most profound. The story is more that of the prodigal father, who is extravagant when it comes to his sons. The sons are prodigal in failure; the father in generosity.

The story is familiar: The younger son asks for a share of his father's estate. He wants a life apart. In effect, he says: "Give me my part of your stuff, Dad. I'm going to take off and live alone." His father obliges and the young man departs for a distant country, quickly squandering his inheritance. He is soon destitute—and chastened by his intemperance.

He returns home, prepared to acknowledge to his father that he has failed and no longer deserves to be called

his son. The younger son has come to his senses. He is content, even eager, to be treated as no more than a hired worker. But he's in for a big surprise, as we'll all be. God is greater than our sins.

Luke writes that while the younger son "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." He calls for a feast to celebrate his son's return. The older son protests that he has never disobeyed his father or given him grief. This is true, but the older son is trying to find his legitimacy in obedience, not love. He doesn't know about simple relationship—and the Bible is all about relationship. When we don't have a living relationship, we often try to substitute with duty and obligation.

## A Glimpse of God

"Everything I have is yours," the father insists. What a marvelous response and image of God! God is like a prodigal father who welcomes his son without explanation. No questions are asked about why the son is returning home; no apology is requested. He throws his arms around him and invites everyone to celebrate because his son who "was dead has come to life again; he was lost and has been found."

This isn't just a son, but a returned son. It's when we return that we know how important union is, what strength and joy relationship gives. It's one of the most consistent messages of the Bible: It's in losing that we discover what we have. Alienation isn't the end of the world; it's the way we commonly come to God. Most biblical figures are transformed

sinner, not people who walk a straight line to God. That isn't the path.

## Universal Lesson

This parable of the prodigal son/father has power to change us because it names human relationships so perfectly. We see ourselves in both sons: We try to live autonomously, yet that eventually leads to alienation and unhappiness. Slowly we gather our truth and our identity. But we're also capable of being the older son who prides himself on his orthodoxy but is unable to celebrate and enjoy a free gift. So we end with an amazing story of one son who does it all right and is wrong, and another son who does it all wrong and is right!

In the end, we never learn whether the elder son attends the banquet, but we do know that the Father continues hoping that his son will come and not live in resentment or superiority toward his brother who has done it all wrong. It is an invitation to all who have perhaps been good Catholics, "older sons," but may also lack compassion and forgiveness. +

## PRAYER

*Lord, you are the face of God's compassion in the world. Give me a compassionate heart to embrace my suffering brothers and sisters.*

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

April 1-6

**Monday**, Lenten Weekday:

Is 65:17-21 / Jn 4:43-54

**Tuesday**, Lenten Weekday:

Ez 47:1-9, 12 / Jn 5:1-16

**Wednesday**, Lenten Weekday:

Is 49:8-15 / Jn 5:17-30

**Thursday**, Lenten Weekday:

Ex 32:7-14 / Jn 5:31-47

**Friday**, Lenten Weekday:

Wis 2:1a, 12-22 / Jn 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

**Saturday**, Lenten Weekday:

Jer 11:18-20 / Jn 7:40-53