

## Bible Study

### Fourth Sunday of Lent, Cycle C

**Opening Prayer:** (Sign of the Cross) “Holy God, when we were baptized, you entered into a covenant with each of us, making us your adopted sons and daughters. You are our only God, but we have not always been faithful to that. May your grace call us to conversion through your word, which we reflect upon this day. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Lord. Amen.”

#### Focusing Questions

1. Would you say that you are quick to forgive, or are you good at holding on to hurts and grudges?
2. What difference do you see between “forgiveness” and “reconciliation”?

#### Commentary before the First Reading: Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

This part of the story of God’s Chosen People begins right after they had crossed the Jordan River from the east and had finally set foot back in the Promised Land, called Canaan at that time. We should remember that the Promised Land was still occupied by various other tribes and clans, and the Israelites were a group of large families more than they were a nation; but they were finally back in the place where their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had lived and raised their families. They were slaves no more. In spite of their frequent failure to be faithful to their covenant with God during the years crossing the desert from Egypt, God never abandoned His people.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. A “reproach” is a scolding or a punishment that is the consequence of doing something bad. What is the “reproach” that God said was now finished?
2. Which “passing over” is celebrated by the Jewish festival of Passover? How is that different from the “passing over” that Christians celebrate at Easter?
3. Does it seem that the Israelites were encamped on the plains of Gilgal for a short time or for several months? How can we tell that?
4. Since the manna ceased to appear once the Israelites were in Canaan, in what new ways did God provide for them now?
5. Would it be correct to say that this account is part of a continuing story of forgiveness or more correct to say that it is the end of a story about exile?

#### Commentary before the Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

This reading speaks of another kind of new life, that which happens when two parties reconcile. To reconcile means to remove all barriers between 2 parties or entities. To be reconciled is to become new, because true reconciliation changes both parties in some way. Notice how many times Saint Paul uses some form of the word in this short selection. God reconciled humanity with himself through Jesus’ life and especially through his death and resurrection. We, in turn, are called to be reconcilers on behalf of others.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. There is a common emphasis among all three readings today: with whom does all reconciliation begin?
2. Our being reconciled with God does not change God, of course; however, when 2 people are reconciled, both are changed. How so?
3. What was the newness in their lives to which Saint Paul referred in this reading?
4. “...Ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us” – for what to happen?
5. What does the last sentence of the reading mean when Saint Paul says that Jesus “became sin” and we “become the righteousness of God”?
6. React to this: “Reconciliation is a life-style, an attitude about how to relate to other people.”

#### Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Bishop Robert Barron, creator and narrator of the Catholicism video series, says that when Jesus ate with known sinners and traitors such as tax collectors, he was just being God, doing what God would naturally do. The Pharisees could only see that he was doing what no respectable person in their society would do. Jesus responded with the story of the Prodigal Son. God withholds love and mercy from no one who seeks it. Therefore, not even a tax collector may be denied reconciliation with God.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Which word or phrase in this famous story touched your heart today?
2. From Jesus' point of view, how would his eating with tax collectors and those known to be sinners have been part of an act of reconciliation?
3. Whom does the younger son represent in the story? the older son? and the father?
4. Which statement in the parable really is also Jesus' response to the ridiculing of the Pharisees?
5. How many parallels do you see between God and the father of the 2 sons in the story?

### **Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives**

1. As is evident with the older son and with the Jewish leaders, why is it so hard to see our own sin?
2. Which is easier: to affirm the righteous and faithful or to offer forgiveness to those who have turned away from us or harmed us? Why do you think that is so?
3. Saint John Paul II stated that a society which locks up or even puts to death its worst sinners cannot also be a nation of forgiveness, reconciliation, and hope. How much do you agree with that?
4. What part does the Sacrament of Reconciliation play in your life?
5. Does confessing your sins make you feel like "a new creation"?
6. Why is "Reconciliation" a better name for that sacrament than "Penance" or "Confession"?
7. What sort of "wilderness" or "dry desert" have you been attempting to leave behind during this Lent? Is here something specific you need to do this week in order to make progress on that?

### **Closing Prayer**

"Lord God our Father, you seek out and wait for your wandering children to return to your embrace; you pursue the sinner with constant invitations to conversion and renewal. Draw all of us closer to you during this season of mercy and reconciliation, and dry our tears of shame and sorrow. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen." (Sign of the Cross)