

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT (YEAR C)
10th MARCH 2013

Joshua 5.9-12; Psalm 34.2-7; 2 Cor 5.17-21; Luke 15.1-3,11-32

Have any of us been grumbling or complaining to God recently. Moaning about the situation we find ourselves in, which in truth may be partly due to us not doing what God is asking of us. Well, the Israelites had been grumbling for years since leaving Egypt (short memories) yet in the first reading we hear how God takes away all the shame from them, the same of their sin and the darkness of slavery are behind them. Parents should understand this, however much our children go astray or may grumble, we'll put that behind us because we love them (children, you must also know this). Just so, God gives his children of Israel a new start, they are reconciled again.

Reconciliation is also at the heart of today's Gospel. The Prodigal son is the story of Israel, of the human race, of every believer. God does not hold on to our faults (although we might); and even more extraordinary is the fact that as a believer Paul reminds us that we are in Christ and we are a new creation. Believe it! Whilst it can sound nice and cosy, I am a new creation in Christ, as a new creation we inherit a job. St Paul tells us we have been trusted with the job of handing on God's reconciliation; he says "it is as though God were appearing through us".

This means that on a daily level we must give our forgiveness to anyone who offends us, people should be able to identify that we are Catholics by our readiness to forgive. That does not mean we allow ourselves to be walked over, but that we do have a generous, loving heart. And in an even more special way God's longing and forgiveness comes to us in the sacrament of penance, that's the work of reconciliation Paul talks about.

Now then, when we sin – and that is to do anything that takes us away from God – we become the prodigal. We leave our Father's house, taking our hearts away from our Father. The result is we lose/squander the good things God has given us and wants to give us. When we do things our way, not God's way, we become slaves to our desires and easily end up seeing God as master (with restrictive rules), rather than a father who wants to embrace us.

Let's get back to the story, the Prodigal Son. He started off enjoying his share of his estate, sounds like he was living the high life. But he became a slave to this way of living which is why he continued until he had nothing left. Then his need to be self reliant meant he worked as labourer feeding pigs. (That's as low as one can get if you are Jewish!). I wonder also if it was shame or pride that kept him there, away from his Father. But, but, but...that's not the end of the story. He does come to his senses and decides that whilst he is no longer worthy to be called a son, he could work as a slave for his father and be well enough cared for.

Even so, notice that perhaps the son's image of his father has been warped by his experiences and that he now looks upon him as "master". The son is going to go back because he knows this master looks after his slaves, not because he truly (yet) knows his love. Has our image of God

been adversely affected by what we have been taught in the past or experienced. We must do away with the idea of an angry or uncaring God – that’s a wrong image the world promotes. God wants to call us daughter and son, to tell us “all I have is yours”. For this to happen, we need to know and believe we are His children, in fact I dare say we need to fall in love with Him.

Well, as Father Stephen advised us last week, don’t procrastinate, get on and do something and find out the truth. Our heavenly Father is longing to hold us. What would have happened to the prodigal son if he had procrastinated? If he had stayed too long in his mess, he would have died, distant from his father and outside of his heritage, he was a son, not a slave. If we are proud and self reliant, or if we feel shame about something we have done or thought, let’s make sure we don’t end up dying outside the heritage God desires so strongly to give us.

Listen to this (symbolism). For the climax of the story the father sees his son a long way off, runs to him, kisses him, restores his dignity, puts a ring on his finger, then has a feast! This is an outrageous wonderful love.

I don’t know when anyone here last went to confession. But take this on board. If like the prodigal son it’s been years, expect our Father to be searching the horizon for you, as soon as he sees you coming the certainty is he forgives you, and he’s going to have a party for you. If it’s only been a few weeks – great! You’re being strengthened every time you receive the sacrament, and only good can come from that.

You know, we have work to do. Clearly we have to share God’s forgiveness with the world, in Paul’s words we are ambassadors for Christ. But we need help to do this, so another job is to discover and know in our hearts that we are God’s children. This will give us immeasurable strength. Then we will know he is always watching for us; that we are always forgiven when we say sorry. And then, we can hear those words, “All I have is yours”. Don’t procrastinate, get right and keep right with our Father in heaven.

Rev Jonathan de Kretser