

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT
Year C: Jos 5:9A, 10-12; Ps 34; 2Cor 5:17-21; Lk 15:1-3, 11-32
March 27, 2022
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Lent is half-over. It's already half-way between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. Easter is three weeks from today. Three weeks down, and three weeks to go. As the opening prayer for today's Mass says, we are hastening toward the solemn celebrations to come. We are hastening toward the celebrations of Holy Week and Easter, when we will celebrate the great act by which we were reconciled to God. That's the whole purpose of this season of Lent, to prepare us to be ready and worthy to commemorate how Christ offered His life on the Cross for us. During these days of Lent, we are preparing ourselves to celebrate the feast and the truth of our redemption.

So, half-way through Lent, each of us should ask ourselves, how is it going? What's been happening in my soul this Lent? What am I learning about myself as a result of how I'm living this Lent? Have there been any messages or lessons from God for me? Have I realized anything new about how my faith influences and determines my life? Have I realized anything in particular about how God tries to direct and steer me in life? Have I realized anything new about how I think of God and relate to Him? These are good questions for us to reflect on half-way through Lent.

To help us with this reflection, on this Fourth Sunday of Lent, the Church asks us to consider the famous Parable of the Prodigal Son that we just heard in the Gospel. To be prodigal means to spend money or resources freely and recklessly and to be wasteful. So, the parable is named after the first, younger son, who commits the serious sin of squandering his inheritance on a life of dissipation. He selfishly asked his father for his share of the estate, and then went off and wasted it on a sinful life.

It could be that most of us don't relate too much with the younger, prodigal son. It could be that, for most of us, the figure in the parable we relate to more is the other, older son, who gets angry when his father forgives the prodigal son and welcomes him back. It could be that the significance of this famous parable for most of us is to examine why we are faithful to God.

The older son felt that he somehow lost out on something, when his younger brother was welcomed home. Instead of being happy about his brother's

conversion, the older son was angry and thinking instead of himself. He complains to his father, “*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.*” In reply, his father said, “*My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours.*” The response of the father is God’s way of saying to all of us: You have everything when you are faithful to me, and you should be satisfied with being faithful and not upset or resentful when others need my mercy. No one loses anything when God shows mercy to those in need. No one loses. Everyone wins.

The parable of the Prodigal Son also invites us to ask ourselves: why are we faithful to God? Is it because we love Him and believe He deserves our praise and worship, or is it because we hope to gain something by it? It’s certainly good and right to desire and hope for eternal life, as a result of our faith, but an even better reason for being faithful to God is simply because of our love *for Him*, rather than a calculation of what it will gain *for us*. The older son in the parable was thinking of how his loyalty to his father would benefit himself, not of how his father deserved his loyalty and service. The older son invites us to reflect on why we try to be faithful to God.

Lent is already half-over. But there is still the second half of Lent for us to live well, so that we can be prepared to celebrate the mystery of our redemption. As we begin the second half of Lent, we can keep in mind St. Paul’s words from the second reading today: “*Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ.*” During the days of Lent that are left, let us cooperate with God’s efforts to change us and make us a new creation by being faithful to Him because of Who He is and rejoicing when He gives His great mercy to others and to us.