

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, Year C, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019: Laetare Sunday

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

*The descendants of Abram received the promised land and the descendants of the people who left Egypt occupied the land. In today's selection, the Israelites have arrived in the land promised them. They had wandered for forty years because they had refused to enter the land when God first brought them to it and also because the adults had longed for the comforts of Egypt. The children, who had lived on manna their whole lives, did not remember Egypt and their only home would be the new land.<sup>5</sup> In today's selection they have crossed over the River Jordan. Israel has no king, nor is there any kingdom of Israel. The people are ruled by Moses' successor, Joshua.<sup>1</sup> This passage which recounts the arrival of the Israelites in the promised land, is a symbol of our arrival in the promised land of heaven.<sup>6</sup>*

**9**The Lord said to Joshua, Joshua took over the leadership of the Israelites after Moses and it was he who led them into the promised land. (Joshua 1:1-9) **"Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you."** This may mean the influences of Egypt, which is a euphemism for sin, have been removed.<sup>6</sup> Another interpretation is that the "reproach of Egypt" refers to their time of slavery.<sup>4</sup> For either of these interpretations, this day marked the end of those who were slaves and the end of those who carried the desire for Egypt.<sup>3</sup> Another possibility is that Joshua had just circumcised the young men who were born during the desert years because their circumcision had been postponed. This shows that the people who have come to the gates of the Promised Land, have attained maturity and Israel is now truly a people who belong to God.<sup>7</sup>

**10**While the Israelites were encamped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, they celebrated the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth of the month. The pilgrimage out of Egypt also began on the feast of Passover 40 years before.<sup>2</sup>

**11**On the day after the Passover, they ate of the produce of the land. This is significant because they are no longer nomads.<sup>6</sup> **in the form of unleavened cakes and parched grain.**

**12**On that same day after the Passover, on which they ate of the produce of the land, the manna ceased. No longer was there manna for the Israelites, This is a reminder that God has seen Israel through the desert by providing for their needs.<sup>2</sup> **who that year ate of the yield of the land of Canaan.** This is a time of change, a time of "coming home" and being in a newly established "right relationship" with God. Our roots are in the Old Testament. The history of Israel is our history as well, and not just a foreshadowing of the Christian era, but a long and consistent line of God's loving intervention on our behalf.<sup>2</sup>

### 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

#### Brothers and sisters:

**17**Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: Paul is contrasting the "before" and "after" of his conversion as happens through Baptism, for it not only purifies from all sins,<sup>5</sup> (CCC 977) but also makes one a new creature,<sup>5</sup> (CCC 1265) an adopted son of God, who has become a partaker of the divine nature, member of Christ and co-heir with him and a temple of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> (CCC 1997) It changes those who allow themselves to be affected by it.<sup>4</sup> **the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.** Paul sees the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as the dividing line between two periods of the history of human, indeed of all, activity in this world.<sup>4</sup> St. John Chrysostom points out the radical change which the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ has brought about, and the consequent difference between Judaism and Christianity: "Instead of the

earthly Jerusalem, we have received that Jerusalem which is above; and instead of a material temple we have seen a spiritual temple; instead of tablets of stone holding the divine Law, our own bodies have become the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit; instead of circumcision, Baptism; instead of manna, the Lord's body; instead of water from a rock, blood from his side; instead of Moses' or Aaron's rod, the cross of the Savior; instead of the promised land, the kingdom of heaven."<sup>8</sup> The current year of our Lord (anno Domini) is a number based on the supposed year Jesus Christ was born, devised by Dionysius Exiguus who died in 550 A.D. Thus, 2007 A.D. is to be that many years after Christ was born and 2007 B.C. is that many years before the birth of Christ.<sup>10</sup>

**18** And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ. God never leaves or offends us. He is the loving Father who always wants us back. We become estranged by our evil deeds. **and given us the ministry of reconciliation,** Christ has willed that in her prayer and life and action his whole Church should be the sign and instrument of the forgiveness and reconciliation that he acquired for us at the price of his blood. But he entrusted the exercise of the power of absolution to the apostolic ministry (apostles and their ordained successors) which he charged with the ministry of reconciliation. The apostle is sent out on behalf of Christ with God making his appeal through him and pleading: "Be reconciled to God."<sup>5</sup> (CCC 1442)

**19** namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. The work of reconciliation has been accomplished by Christ but not fully realized. God has reconciled the world; now the world must respond and reconcile itself with God to make it complete.<sup>2</sup> Forgiveness bears witness that, in our world, love is stronger than sin. **FORGIVENESS IS THE FUNDAMENTAL CONDITION OF THE RECONCILIATION OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD WITH THEIR FATHER AND OF MEN WITH ONE ANOTHER.**<sup>5</sup> (CCC 2844)

**20** So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. Ambassadors were envoys who represented Roman emperors in distant territories. These representatives carried the authority of the reigning ruler with them wherever they went. Christians in general and the apostles in particular bear, each in their own way, the royal, priestly, and prophetic authority of Christ to the world.<sup>9</sup> **We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.** Reconciliation can be lost. We live in the new age of Christ and we are not to return to the old ways of sin.<sup>6</sup>

**21** For our sake he made him Jesus Christ to be sin. This is a shorthand expression for "sin offering".<sup>9</sup> Jesus was not made a sinner nor was he personally counted guilty of sin on the Cross. Rather, he bore the curse of death that mankind incurred because of sin.<sup>9</sup> **who did not know sin,** Jesus himself never sinned.<sup>9</sup> In the OT nothing unclean or blemished could be offered to God. The offering of an unblemished animal obtained God's pardon for the transgression which one wanted to expiate. Since Jesus was the most perfect of victims offered for us, he made full atonement for all sins.<sup>8</sup> **so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.** "Righteousness" is the state of being in right covenant relationship.<sup>11</sup> This refers to God's own righteousness that is made known to the world when He is faithful to His covenants and it also refers to the gift of righteousness that God imparts to the baptized.<sup>9</sup> This means that we might have a reconciled, intimate, covenant relationship with God. It means that we can become God's loyal subject, adopted child, spouse, (the Church is the bride of Christ), and friend.<sup>11</sup>

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

*This story of the Prodigal Son (which has been called the greatest short story in the world) has been used in the past to explain the extension of the covenant blessings beyond the Jewish people (represented by the elder brother) to the Gentiles (represented by the younger prodigal). It has also been used to explain God's forgiving love toward the repentant sinner. (That is, all of us.) Lately, it has more often been used to explain the errors of pharisaism (This is the practice of the external forms of religion or morality without genuine regard for the proper reasons for doing so.) by looking more intently at the attitudes of the elder brother towards his younger brother who sinned against his father.<sup>5</sup> At another level, the parable narrates the exile and eventual homecoming of historical Israel. After the reign of King Solomon, Israel split into two kingdoms, becoming like two brothers living side by side in northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) Palestine. By the eighth century B.C., the Assyrians had carried off the northern tribes of Israel into a far country, where they forsook God and worshiped idols, a sin the prophets called harlotry. In the New Covenant, God welcomes home his exiled son by lavishing him with mercy and restoring him to full sonship.<sup>12</sup>*

**1** Tax collectors These people were hated collaborators with Rome, men who took what little their neighbors had, kicked some up to their bosses, and kept a hefty cut for themselves.<sup>1</sup> **and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus,**

**2** but the Pharisees and scribes It is crucial to note that this parable was told to those who were scandalized at Jesus' association with sinners.<sup>6</sup> **began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."** The Pharisees shunned the people who did not keep the law. They were forbidden to have anything to do with a known sinner. They were shocked at Jesus' actions for they believed that if you talked to a sinner, ate with a sinner, spent time with a sinner, you must be a sinner.<sup>14</sup>

**3** So to them Jesus addressed this parable: There are three parables in Luke 15 which all have the common note of divine mercy toward sinners. This is the distilled essence of the good news, the gospel within the Gospel.<sup>4</sup>

**11** "A man had two sons, Both groups that Jesus is addressing, the tax collectors/sinners and the Pharisees/scribes, are called to be sons.

**12** and the younger son said to his father, 'Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' It was unusual and even shameful for a son to demand his inheritance before his father's death. Here the prodigal son compounded his father's dishonor by squandering his inheritance in sin.<sup>12</sup> **So the father divided the property between them.**

**13** After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country This means the ways of sin, far from God.<sup>17</sup> **where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.** This parable indirectly touches upon every breach of the covenant of love, every loss of grace, every sin.<sup>13</sup>

**14** When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need.

**15** So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. Feeding pigs was forbidden by law in 2 Maccabees: "Cursed is he who feeds the swine." The swine is enumerated among the unclean animals in both Leviticus and in Deuteronomy. In the Maccabean period abstention from pork became one of the key symbols of Jewish observance.<sup>15</sup> Working for a Gentile employer, he would be expected to violate the weekly Sabbath as well.<sup>12</sup> For the son to tend the swine (for a Gentile, no less!) means that he had fallen as far as a Jew could fall.<sup>15</sup>

**16** And he longed to eat his fill of the pods The fruit of the carob tree.<sup>16</sup> **on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any.** Here we are shown the unhappy effects of sin. The young man's hunger

evokes the anxiety and emptiness a person feels when he is far from God. The prodigal son's predicament describes the enslavement which sin involves for by sinning one loses the freedom of the sons of God and hands oneself over to the power of Satan.<sup>13</sup>

**17**Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. His hunger is like the emptiness one feels when far from God.<sup>13</sup>

**18**I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son;

**19**treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.' Repentance is a returning to our Father's house through the whole of our lives. We return through contrition, through the conversion of heart which means a desire to change, the confession of our sins, and a firm decision to improve our life which is expressed in sacrifice and self-giving.<sup>13</sup>

**20**So he got up and went back to his father. This is called the parable of the Prodigal Son because the word "prodigal" means excessive, immoderate and wasteful, the opposite of frugal. In a sense, it is the father who is the real prodigal! In the same way, Jesus is the prodigal, the spendthrift, the profligate, the one who squanders his love on those who need it most.<sup>2</sup> While he was still a long way off, This is how God deals with us. While we are still a long way off, still covered with the mire of the pig lot, God rushes toward us with compassion and embraces us, giving orders to prepare the feast before we can even get the words of remorse out of our mouths.<sup>2</sup> his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. The story shifts to the father who sees, feels, runs, embraces and kisses his son.<sup>16</sup>

**21**His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' God seems to have more love for certain repentant sinners and to give them far greater graces than certain others who have never gone seriously astray as we see in such striking cases as those of Mary Magdalen, the Penitent Thief, St. Paul, St. Augustine, and many others. This fact reminds us of another scripture, "There will be more gladness in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." (Luke 15:7) And Matt. 20:15 tells us that we are not to be envious because God is generous.<sup>17</sup>

**22**But his father ordered his servants, The father responds before the son has a chance to say, "treat me as a worker."<sup>16</sup> 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. The father gave the son a robe of honor and a ring that gave unlimited buying power and shoes which set him apart from slaves and hired servants for they usually went barefoot.<sup>14</sup> The slave's dream in the Negro spiritual is of the time when "all God's chilln got shoes," for shoes were the sign of freedom.<sup>18</sup> The father restored him to full family membership.<sup>12</sup>

**23**Take the fattened calf In contrast to the cattle left to graze on grass, this beast was destined for a special feast as it was stuffed with grain to put on extra weight and tenderness. It is a mark of great esteem to spend this valuable possession for a celebration.<sup>16</sup> and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast,

**24**because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' This is a transfer of covenant status from curse to blessing. It is a restoration from spiritual death to eternal life.<sup>12</sup> Then the celebration began.

**25**Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing.

**26**He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean.

**27**The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened

calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

28He became angry, We betray our spiritual poverty by our inability to be prodigals ourselves — by our inability to squander our love and concern, by our tendency to be frugal with mercy.<sup>2</sup> and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. The father’s love is expressed by his coming out also to meet this elder son.<sup>16</sup>

29He said to his father in reply, The elder son omits the polite address, “Father,” used by the younger son. ‘Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; The elder son is like righteous Jews who do not “need repentance.”<sup>16</sup> yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. The language is quite bitter. The goat is a much more common and cheaper commodity. Notice that he wanted it to celebrate with his friends, not with his father. He is alienated even though he never left home!<sup>16</sup>

30But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’ We betray our spiritual poverty as the older brother did, by our inability to be prodigals ourselves, by our inability to squander our love and concern, by our tendency to be frugal with mercy. But we need not despair because the Prodigal Father squanders his love even on our pettiness!

31He said to him, ‘My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours.

32But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’” The story does not tell us what the elder brother decided as we must each make that decision ourselves.<sup>6</sup>

*Some of the material for this commentary has been taken from: (1) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 2007” by James L. Weaver, (2) “workbook FOR LECTORS AND GOSPEL READERS: 1995” by Aelred Rosser, (3) The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Gray, (4) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (5) “The Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (6) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers;1998” by Lawrence E. Mick, (7) “The Navarre Bible: Joshua-Kings, (8) “The Navarre Bible: Corinthians,” (9) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The First and Second Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians” With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (10) “Catholic Source Book” edited by Rev. Peter Klein, (11) “The Story Of Stories” by Karen Lee-Thorp, (12) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of LUKE” With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (13) “The Navarre Bible: St. Luke,” (14) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken e³ Marie Finn, (15) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (16) “The Gospel of Luke” by Luke Timothy Johnson (17) “The Parables Of Christ” by Charles J. Callan, O.P., and (18) “The Gospel Of Luke” by William Barclay.*

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*