

Fourth Sunday of Lent – Cycle C
Focus: Recovering what was lost

First Reading
[JOS 5:9A, 10-12](#)

Psalm
[PS 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7](#)

Second Reading
[2 COR 5:17-21](#)

Gospel
[LK 15:1-3, 11-32](#)

Today we celebrate Laetare Sunday. As we may all recall, Laetare is Latin for rejoicing. In these readings there is much to rejoice about. From our first reading from Joshua we heard about the celebration of the first Passover in the land God had given the people of Israel. We heard how, at consuming the yield of the first harvest, the manna no longer fell in the morning dewfall. The people were self-sufficient only relying upon God's generosity of land and love.

In our second reading from St Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, we heard of that great mission and ministry of reconciliation. We are informed how our priorities, that which we find most important to us, must be different. Our priority must focus on reconciliation and thus bring our selves to holiness.

This is the most obvious imagery of the Gospel. In it we see the younger son squander everything only to return in hopes of getting a job as a servant on his father's estate. You see, the younger son knew how generous his father was towards his family and all who worked for him. So here is where he decided to reconcile to his father. What happens next is often overlooked because everyone is focused on the younger son. The father runs to his younger son. The father does not wait on the porch for his son to arrive, beg and pled for forgiveness. Quite the contrary, the Father runs to him while he is still a great distance out. He embraces and kisses him, orders the fattened calf slaughtered and cooked.

So from the first reading, we heard of the tangible results of the covenant with Moses. We heard how God remained with the people of Israel. In our second reading, we heard that God is appealing to the world through us. In the Gospel we heard that it only takes the slightest movement to reconcile with God in which God takes us back immediately and unconditionally.

This is great news to rejoice over, isn't it? To not have to justify our worthiness before God to be reconciled. You bet it is! But as you know, there is always more to the story. As many of you know, when the younger son demanded his inheritance he was essentially wishing his father was dead. Did you also know that selling off, divesting of property to pay out an inheritance early required a penalty be paid to the government, much like early withdrawals from our retirement account. Did you also know that the older

son is entitled to twice that received by his brothers. In this case, the older son would receive two-thirds of the estate at his father's passing. But now with the penalty and the lost of potentially productive land, the older son's eventual inheritance is much less. All of this is compounded by the fact there is one less able body male to do the work of the estate.

How do you think the elder son felt as the father fulfilled on the request of the younger son? How do you think the elder son felt when his younger brother left? Do you see anger, perhaps? Do you see animosity towards the younger brother? Do you see him confused and questioning why the father was agreeing? Have we not felt this way ourselves at times, maybe not towards a sibling but perhaps towards a people, friends, a leader, or a movement? It is very easy to see the elder brother's animosity at first. However, later in the Gospel we hear something much more striking. We hear the magnitude of the elder brother's response to his father's choices for first giving the inheritance to the younger son and then reconciling after the younger son lost everything. We hear that the elder son's anger, his self-righteous indignation against his brother, manifested against his father and then cascaded blindly against his own friends, his community. You see the anger, that not knowing the details of why, the confusion at "how could you", not being able to comprehend his father's actions has trapped the older brother? It so trapped him that he simply turned away from his father's table. He also turned away from his friends. "You never even gave me a young goat to feast on with my friends" the father responded... "All I have is yours."

So now that we see the elder son in the bright light of reconciliation and God's forgiveness is it not possible to see how, when the younger son left, the elder son left as well? While the one son was physically and spiritually gone, the elder son had also left spirituality.

Our challenge is to identify who we are in this story. Are we the father who simply, unconditionally forgives and is thankful for all that we have? Are we the younger son who has squandered God's generosity by passing judgment on others or holding grudges to make friends suffer to make your point? Are we the elder son who, upon seeing all of the changes and the insults levied given rise to anger and self-righteousness and separation from his father much like the younger son?

The time has come on this Laetare Sunday to rejoice in the Lord and seek reconciliation and be fully present members of God's faithful.