

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her.
Be joyful, all who were in mourning;
exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast.

COLLECT

O God, who through your Word reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way, grant, we pray, that with prompt devotion and eager faith the Christian people may hasten toward the solemn celebrations to come. Through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FIRST READING

Joshua 5:9-12

A reading from the book of Joshua.

The Lord said to Joshua, “Today I have taken the shame of Egypt away from you.”

The Israelites pitched their camp at Gilgal and kept the Passover there on the fourteenth day of the month, at evening in the plain of Jericho. On the morrow of the Passover they tasted the produce of that country, unleavened bread and roasted ears of corn, that same day. From that time, from their first eating of the produce of that country, the manna stopped falling. And having manna no longer, the Israelites fed from that year onwards on what the land of Canaan yielded.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalms 33

Response:

Taste and see that the Lord is good.

1. I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise always on my lips; in the Lord my soul shall make its boast. The humble shall hear and be glad. (R.)
2. Glorify the Lord with me. Together let us praise his name. I sought the Lord and he answered me; from all my terrors he set me free. (R.)
3. Look towards him and be radiant; let your faces not be abashed. This poor man called; the Lord heard him and rescued him from all his distress. (R.)

SECOND READING

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

A reading from the second letter of St Paul to the Corinthians.

For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here. It is all God’s work. It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on his reconciliation. In other words, God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself, not holding men’s faults against them, and he has entrusted to us the news that they are reconciled. So we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were appearing through us, and the appeal that we make in Christ’s name is: be reconciled to God. For our sake God made the sinless one into sin, so that in him we

might become the goodness of God.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus!
I will leave this place and go to my father and say:
“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.”
Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus!

GOSPEL

Luke 15:1-3.11-32

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. “This man” they said “welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So he spoke this parable to them:

“A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, ‘Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me.’ So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery.

“When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, ‘How many of my father’s paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants.’ So he left the place and went back to his father.

“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

“Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. ‘Your brother has come’ replied the servant ‘and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound.’ He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, ‘Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But for this son of yours, when he comes back

after swallowing up your property – he and his women – you kill the calf we had been fattening.’

“The father said, ‘My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it is only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found.’”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
(all bow during the next two lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

We place before you with joy these offerings, which bring eternal remedy, O Lord, praying that we may both faithfully revere them and present them to you, as is fitting, for the salvation of all the world.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

You must rejoice, my son,
for your brother was dead and has come to life;
he was lost and is found.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O God, who enlighten everyone who comes into this world, illuminate our hearts, we pray, with the splendour of your grace, that we may always ponder what is worthy and pleasing to your majesty and love you in all sincerity.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE PEOPLE

Look upon those who call to you, O Lord, and sustain the weak; give life by your unfailing light to those who walk in the shadow of death, and bring those rescued by your mercy from every evil to reach the highest good.

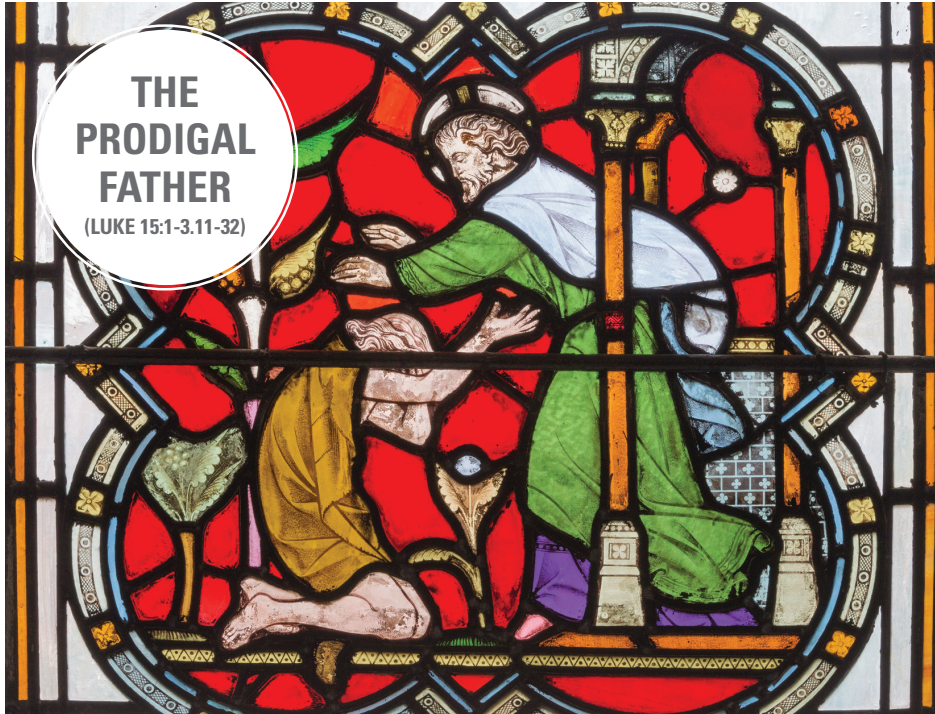
31 MARCH 2019

Sunday Message

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT (LAETARE)

THE WORD

Year C • Season Colour: Purple/Rose • Psalter Week 4



A depiction of the parable of the prodigal son in the Church of St Michael Cornhill, by Clayton and Bell, 19th century

Jesus conveys his message by what he does just as much as by what he says. When he eats with people on the margins of social and religious society, he is revealing what God is like.

This is a parable in action, and the story of the lost son is a masterpiece of insight and writing, which explains the meaning of Jesus’ sharing table-fellowship.

Luke invites us to consider the reactions to the return of the reckless young man who has come to his senses as the result of bitter experience. On the one hand we have the father (God) who is overjoyed at regaining his lost child. On the other, there is the embittered elder brother (the Pharisees and scribes) whose life of dutiful service he describes in terms of *slavery*. The first part of the story shows the positive response of outcasts to the prophet: they do not come simply to eat with him but *to listen to him*, and they accept his message. But the religious people cannot accept that God is like this, because it does not fit in with the way in which they understand God and God’s attitude to human beings. Like the elder brother, they prefer to stay outside, wrapped in self-righteous indignation. ■

REFLECT

If the parable of the Lost (or *Prodigal*) Son were simply a record of what Jesus said to the people of his day, we could regard it simply as an interesting and edifying account of Jesus criticising the attitude of the Jewish religious leaders of that time. Unfortunately, perhaps, that is not the case. We are being put on the spot: we are being asked to take the side of either the father or the elder brother. How do we feel about people who want to rejoin our community after a period away? Are we pleased, even joyful? Or

do we feel that it’s all too easy, that there should be some sort of penalty?

In the end, the question is perhaps more about our own idea of God. Do we believe in God as a loving merciful parent who loves all their children equally? Or is our God one whom we serve out of a sense of duty with little if any personal relationship involved? The elder brother represents those people who keep the rules but feel unrewarded, unappreciated and end up full of anger and resentment, deep down at God, but this comes out in hostility towards other people. Instead of

SAY

Jesus eats with sinners.

DO

Look at the money in your pocket. Would you be prepared to spend it all – and more – on a meal to celebrate the return of someone who had made a complete mess of their life? Or would your attitude be one of righteous satisfaction, *That’ll teach him or her!*? Which attitude is Jesus encouraging us to adopt, if we are to be truly his disciples?



LEARN

The word *prodigal* means *wasteful*.

The parable might be better entitled *The Prodigal Father*.

The parables are the prophetic word of Jesus.

They are addressed to us today, personally: each of us is challenged to respond.

developing a proper relationship with his father, the older son dwells on his own unsatisfying situation in life: perhaps, deep down, he is jealous of his brother’s escaping from the family home and breaking all the rules.

Our reaction to the characters tells us something about ourselves. But we have a choice: the elder son is free to join the party; the scribes and Pharisees can decide to accept Jesus’ invitation. It is our decision. What sort of God do you believe in? ■