

Reflection Questions

- What old things have passed away as you have taken on the identity as a beloved son or daughter of God? What new things have come?
- How do you relate to each of the characters in the Parable of the Prodigal Son?
- What do you do to help maintain your spiritual condition and carry the vision of God's will into your daily activities?

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Sunday Mass Readings This Week

1st Reading: Joshua 5:9A, 10-12

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

2nd Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

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

4th Sunday of Lent



This Sunday's Gospel reading is one that deeply resonates with the journey of recovering addicts and families who have found freedom from attachments—the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Overlapped with the sacraments of the Church, the 12 steps provide a framework to experience how God longs for our renewal, return, and recovery. We first consider the words of Saint Paul in this week's Second Reading:

*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
and given us the ministry of reconciliation,
namely, God was reconciling the world to
himself in Christ,
not counting their trespasses against them
and entrusting to us the message of
reconciliation.*

Steps one through five are summarized in this reading. As we realize our own powerlessness and need for Christ, God may make a new creation of us. Reconciliation is made possible by the blood of Christ, who calls us to pick up our cross as we make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. By sharing it with Him, ourselves, and another human being, the shame and hurt left by the stain of our mistrust are removed.

Transformation may happen quickly, or it may happen slowly. Either way, we do not have to wait for God to meet us along the way. The Parable of the Prodigal Son tells the account of a greedy son who asks his father for his inheritance and then squanders it on drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, and moral debauchery. Upon hitting rock bottom, the son decides to return to the father for help:

*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.
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;
treat me as you would treat one of your hired
workers."
So he got up and went back to his father.
While he was still a long way off,
his father caught sight of him, and was filled with
compassion.
He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.*

This story captures the merciful love of the father and the saving grace received by the younger, prodigal son. However, it does not end there as Jesus remarks on the experience of the elder son. Filled with self-righteousness, the older son scorns at the idea of his father's acceptance of the prodigal, making a case for himself while pointing out the unfair nature of the father's embrace. Divine love tends to be unfair, yet we can be quick to point it out when it is not in *our* benefit.

As those who have been bruised by our loved one's behavior, we must heed the warning and learn from the bitter angst of the older son. It is not uncommon for family members of a recovering addict to resent the new life that has risen from their loved one. Some remain stuck in old patterns and continue to suffer.

Therefore, it is important for us to make a daily commitment to surrender ourselves to God's will and take on the compassionate attitude of the prodigal's father. As the *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* (p. 85) notes, "What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities. 'How can I best serve Thee—Thy will (not mine) be done.'"

Only through this understanding and the recognition that no human power can relieve us or others of addiction can we be *ambassadors for Christ*, as Saint Paul concludes in the Second Reading.