

LENT IV (C): JOSHUA 5:9, 10-12; IICOR. 5: 17-21; LK 15:1-3, 11-32

Gandhi's confession: Mohandas K. Gandhi, "the Father of the Nation" in India, in his famous autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, writes about his own experience of theft, confession and forgiveness as a schoolboy. "I was fifteen when I stole a bit of gold out of my brother's armband to clear a debt of about twenty-five rupees, (U.S. \$5 in those days), which he had incurred. He had on his arm an armband of solid gold. It was not difficult to clip a bit out of it. Well, it was done, and the debt cleared. But this became more than I could bear. I resolved never to steal again. I also made up my mind to confess it to my father. But I did not dare to speak.... I decided at last to write out the confession, submit it to my father, and ask his forgiveness. I wrote it on a slip of paper and handed it to him myself. In this note not only did I confess my guilt, but also requested an adequate punishment for it, and closed with a request to him not to punish himself for my offence. I also pledged myself never to steal in the future. I was trembling as I handed the confession to my father. He was then confined to bed. I handed him the note and sat on his bed. He sat up to read it. He read it through, and pearl-drops trickled down his cheeks, wetting the paper. For a moment he closed his eyes in thought and then tore up the note. He again lay down. I also cried. I could see my father's agony. Those pearl-drops of love cleansed my heart, and washed my sin away. Only he who has experienced such love can know what it is... This sort of sublime forgiveness was not natural to my father. I had thought that he would be angry, say hard things, and strike his forehead. But he was so wonderfully peaceful, and I believe this was due to my clean confession. A clean confession, combined with a promise never to commit the sin again, when offered before one who has the right to receive it, is the purest type of repentance. I know that my confession made my father feel absolutely safe about me, and increased his affection for me beyond measure."

The fourth Sunday of Lent marks the midpoint in the Lenten preparation for Easter. Traditionally it is called *Laetare Sunday* (Rejoice Sunday). This Sunday is set aside for us to recall God's graciousness and to rejoice because of it. In many ways we have been dead, but through God's grace we have come to life again; we have been lost, but have now been found. We have every reason to rejoice. Hence, each of the three readings characterizes one of the many facets of Easter joy. In the first reading, the Chosen People of God are portrayed as celebrating, for the first time, the feast of their freedom in their own land. Their joy is one of promises fulfilled. The refrain of today's psalm might be used as a response to all three readings: "*Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.*" The second reading joyfully proclaims the effect of Jesus' saving act as the reconciliation of all peoples to the Father. In the gospel, the joy is that of a young son's "coming home" and rediscovering a father's forgiving and gratuitous love. It is also the story of a loving and forgiving father who celebrates the return of his prodigal son by throwing a big party in his honor, a banquet celebrating the reconciliation of the son with his father, his family, his community and his God.

The Gospel of Luke has been called, "the Gospel of mercy" because Luke, more than the other Gospel writers, stresses how merciful and forgiving is our God. In chapter 15, Luke narrates three parables of Jesus, all three dealing with God's mercy:

- The parable of the shepherd who lost a sheep, (Lk. 15, 4-7)
- The parable of the woman who lost a coin, (Lk. 15, 8-10)
- The parable of the father who lost a son, (Lk. 15, 11-32)

And the last one which we heard in today's Gospel and it has been called "the queen of all the parables;" also called "*the greatest short story in the world*" (by Charles Dickens), "*the gospel of the gospels*", "*the gospel of the outcasts*," and the "*parable of the prodigal father*."

Commonly known as "The parable of the prodigal son." According to one of the scripture scholars, this title is unfortunate; it does not show what the parable is about. It should be called "the parable of the lost son" or still better "the parable of the merciful father", because what Jesus stresses in it, is not so much the misbehavior of the son, as the love and mercy of his father.

The lesson Jesus was keen to convey through this parable was that God is the most merciful, forgiving and understanding towards those who abandon sin and return to him.

We need to accept the loving offer of our Heavenly Father: "*All I have is yours*".

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.

(Robert Frost in *Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening*)

Far away, hills and forest look green; there are many attractions in life; there are many voices saying to us 'follow me' or 'follow your desires and you will find happiness.' However, the best and the only real offer of lasting happiness is from God our Father, "*All I have is yours*". God our heavenly Father is outside the door waiting for us to come to him. For the remainder of Lent let us try to make every effort to answer that invitation from our heavenly Father, "*All I have is yours*."

"Lord Jesus, may I never doubt your love nor take for granted the mercy you have shown to me. Fill me with your transforming love that I may be merciful as you are merciful." Mother Teresa.