

FOURTH SUNDY OF LENT; Cycle – C; March 30th 2025
Joshua 5:9, 101-12; 2Corinthians 5:17-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

In the beginning of his public ministry the scribes and Pharisees approved Jesus to be a new rabbi. But when Jesus started associating with the sinners and tax collectors they accused him to be the friend of the sinners and tried to avoid him. Luke says in today's gospel, **"The Pharisees and scribes began to complain saying, this man welcomes sinners and eats with them."** So to them Jesus addressed three parables in Luke chapter 15; *the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son*, which we have just listened to. Only in Luke we have this great parable of the prodigal son which pictures *God to be a loving and forgiving Father*. According to many Scripture Scholars this is the greatest short story ever told.

In its original setting, Jesus told this parable to defend his attitude towards the sinners. The parable shows that, though the children go astray, a good father cannot forget them and stop loving them. The moment they come back home the father rejoices and celebrates. Here Jesus keeps the Heavenly Father in the place of the father of the prodigal son and shows how forgiving and compassionate He is towards a repentant sinner. Luke had a special reason to record this parable in his gospel. He wrote the gospel to the Gentile converts to Christianity, around 80 AD. By that time in Palestine the apathy against Christians was growing rapidly and the little community was pushed to Antioch where they went through an identity crisis. Good number of the members went back to their old paganism while others remained faithful. But some time later, some of the defiant members repented and they wanted to make a comeback. But the faithful ones who endured the persecution and suffering were not ready to forgive them and accept them back to the community. This was the wonderful opportunity for Luke to show the Christians, through this parable, *how tolerant and forgiving the Heavenly Father is! So if God is ready to forgive a sinner, how could the Christians do the opposite?*

From the parable it is evident that all the wrong doings were done by the son and the father should not be blamed for his sad fate. The son left his father's home by his own choice and squandered all wealth. Finally, in his dire need and suffering the son came to his senses and realized how wrong he was. At least he had the humility to return to his father and confess his sins. When the father saw his son afar, instead of being filled with anger, **"He was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him."** In that one verse we can get the full picture of that loving father. No doubt, the son didn't come back in his original shape, the way he left home. But the father never failed to recognize him from far. Though the son begins to confess his sins, the father

does not listen to anything of that, rather he was busy ordering his servants for a big celebration of his return. The father knew that the son was repentant. Jesus makes it very clear that exactly the same way God will wait for his lost children and the moment when they come back, He will run and embrace and kiss them.

Please remember, only in Judaism and Christianity we can meet such a forgiving God who is ready to forgive and forget the sins of His children. In the book of Micah the Prophet says, **“Who is there like you, the God who removes guilt and pardons sin for the remnant of his inheritance; who does not persist in anger forever, but delights rather in clemency. You will cast into the depths of the sea all our sins’ (Micah 7:18-19).** Yes, God the Father not only forgives our sins but also forgets them all. As the Prophet says, ‘He will cast into the depths of the sea all our sins.’ In the Letter to the Hebrews we read: **“For I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sins no more, says the Lord.”**

Very often, people who have gone far away from God think that they cannot make a comeback; for, God will never forgive them. So they stay back. Besides that, the older son mentality or the unwelcoming attitude of some members in the community makes it hard for them to come back. If we can have the humility of the prodigal son, it is easy to make a return to the Father. Remember, there are no sins in us which God cannot forgive and forget. God does not count, how many years we have been away from Him; rather He remembers only the day of our return. In Psalm 130 the Psalmist declares his trust in the forgiving God: **If you, Lord, mark iniquities, Lord, who can stand? But with you is forgiveness, and so you are revered.”** In this parable we learn certain great truths: *that it is a lot easier to receive forgiveness from God than from man; God is more merciful in judging than man; God’s love is deeper than that of man; only God can forgive where man refuses to forgive; only God can forget our iniquities which human beings won’t. We may be in bad shape by our sins; but the Father will never fail to recognize us and welcome us back home.* But let us have the humility of the prodigal son to confess, **“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.”**