



4th Sunday of Lent



Date: Sunday, March 30, 2025 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** C

First Reading: Joshua 5:9a, 10–12

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 34:2–7 | **Response:** Psalm 34:9a

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:17–21

Gospel Acclamation: Luke 15:18

Gospel Reading: Luke 15:1–3, 11–32

Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House in the Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia.

There are moments in life when we cross a threshold, when we step from what has been into what will be. Some moments are dramatic—a child taking its first steps, a student receiving a degree, a family moving into a new home. Others are quieter, almost imperceptible—the slow turning of the seasons, the healing of an old wound, the gradual awakening of a heart that had grown cold. Today’s readings are filled with such moments: a people stepping into their inheritance, a soul reborn in the grace of forgiveness, a father welcoming home the lost.

In the book of Joshua, the people of Israel stand on the edge of promise. Their desert wandering is over; the manna that had sustained them for forty years ceases, and they eat from the fruit of the land for the first time. Their identity is being reshaped—not as nomads dependent on heaven’s bread, but as a people rooted in the land God has given them. Yet this moment is not just about geography; it is about grace. God declares, “Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you.” The past is being redeemed, transformed into a foundation rather than a burden. This is what God always does—he does not erase history, but he redeems it. He does not deny our wounds, but he heals them. He does not pretend we have not sinned, but he forgives and renews.

The psalm today sings of this renewal: “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” This is not a theoretical goodness, not a distant promise, but something to be experienced. The Israelites tasted the first fruits of Canaan, and we are called to taste the first fruits of grace. The goodness of the Lord is not abstract; it is the embrace of mercy, the healing of brokenness, the reconciliation of what was divided. It is the homecoming of the human heart.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, speaks with urgency about this reconciliation. “Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.” This is not mere improvement—it is transformation. It is not self-help—it is salvation. And this salvation is not only personal, but communal. Paul insists that we are “ambassadors for Christ.” Having been reconciled, we must now become reconcilers. We are called not only to receive God’s mercy but to extend it, to participate in God’s great work of bringing the lost home.

In the Gospel we are told the parable of all parables, the story that distills the very essence of the Gospel. A younger son, impatient for his inheritance, takes his fortune and squanders it in reckless living. When famine comes, he finds himself starving, envying the food of the swine. He has descended as low as a Jewish man could go—he is not only among the unclean but forced to hunger for their food. And then comes the turning point, the moment of awakening: “I will arise and go to my father.”

What happens next is a revelation of divine love. The father sees him “while he was still a long way off”—because the father has been waiting. He runs to meet him—a shocking gesture for a dignified elder in Middle Eastern culture. He embraces him before a word of repentance is spoken. This is what grace looks like: love that anticipates, love that restores, love that refuses to keep score.

But the story does not end here, for there is another son—a son who has remained, who has labored, who has done all the right things. And yet his heart is far from home. When he sees the feast given to his brother, his resentment boils over. “Look, all these years I have served you, and never did I disobey your orders.” He speaks not as a son, but as a servant, measuring love in terms of merit. How easy it is to fall into this trap, to think that God’s love must be earned rather than received, to begrudge grace when it is given freely.

The father’s response is pure tenderness: “My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours.” But the story ends without resolution. Does the elder son enter the feast? Does he allow grace to soften his heart? We do not know—because the question is left for us. Will we enter the feast of mercy? Will we rejoice when the lost are found? Will we allow grace to change not only our circumstances but our hearts?

This is the heart of the Christian journey: to step across the threshold of mercy, to leave behind the old calculations of sin and merit, to receive and extend the infinite love of God. The prodigal son was lost in reckless living, but the elder son was lost in resentment. One was bound by sin; the other was bound by pride. Only mercy can set them free. Only love can bring them home.

Blessed Dominic Collins, the Irish Jesuit martyr, knew what it meant to lose everything and yet be truly free. A soldier who became a brother, he stood firm in faith even unto death, knowing that the true homeland is not made of earth but of grace. His life, like the parable, reminds us that true belonging is not in wealth, status, or even obedience for its own sake, but in the embrace of the Father's love.

So the question before us is simple, but searching: Where do we find ourselves in this story? Are we the younger son, in need of repentance and a homecoming? Are we the elder son, harboring resentment and struggling to accept mercy? Or are we willing to step into the role of the father, to become ambassadors of reconciliation, to welcome, to forgive, to love beyond all measure?

This week, in the silence of prayer, let us ask:

- What parts of my past need to be redeemed rather than regretted?
- Where have I been slow to accept or extend forgiveness?
- How can I make my life a place of welcome, where others can taste and see the goodness of the Lord?

Let us arise and go to the Father. For his arms are open, the feast is prepared, and the home we have longed for is waiting.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.