

WSC REFLECTION GUIDE

Readings: Jos 5:9 -12
Ps 34:2-7
2 Cor 5:17-21
Lk 15:3, 11-32

4th Sunday of Lent
March 14, 2010

Word: **Holiness in Christ, our Spiritual Rock, calls for repentance.**

Theme: **Christ's call for repentance exhorts us to be reconciled with God and one another.** [Commitment to Reconciliation]

Promise: ***"When the poor one called out, the Lord heard, and from all his distress he saved him."*** (Ps 34:7)

Reflection:

Many of us could probably recite the parable of today's gospel almost word for word. When we think of God's forgiveness, the picture of the Father looking out across the fields, longing and waiting for his son's return enters our minds. We see God giving us a hug, embracing us, calling out to the servants to put a ring on our finger and fetch the finest cloak. We know that God is not concerned with the hurt we inflicted upon Him when we rejected Him. He is concerned only about us, how we are hurting ourselves. When we think of our own sinfulness, and picture the prodigal son who offended his father, we remember how sin puts us in the mud with the pigs. We remember how we've hurt ourselves, as well as others. We know that we can have the courage to get out of the pigsty, turn back home, and say 'I'm sorry' to our loving Father. And He will forgive us even before we can tell our sad story. For years the focus of the parable was on the offending son. In fact, this has always been called the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

More recently, however, the focus of the parable has shifted to the forgiveness of God. The parable is now often referred to as the Parable of the Forgiving Father. Having come from an age when God was hammered into us as the terrible judge, this was a valid and welcome insight into the nature of God. In confession, priests most often emphasize how much God loves the penitent and how forgiveness is an expression of that love.

There is a third character in this parable, one with whom we all tend to identify and with whom we are tempted to agree. That is the elder son. The elder son is angry because even though his brother had committed a horrible offense, the ingrate was being welcomed back with open arms and given a lavish party on his return. "I've struggled for you for years," the elder son says to the Father, "You never had a party for me." We are all inclined to agree with this son. In his mercy for the prodigal, the Father seems not to have treated his elder son fairly. Or did he?

Let's look at the parable closely. The younger son was a real selfish brat. Sons of farmers are generally expected to work the farm for their father until the father dies, and then they take over the farm as their inheritance. This was a form of ancient social security. The prodigal son wasn't about to wait for this to happen. He shirked his responsibility to his father by selling his portion of the property and squandering it. Furthermore, among the ancient Jews, property was sacred; it was their family's portion of the chosen land. "God forbid," Naboth tells King Ahab in 1 Kings 21, "God forbid that I sell the vineyard the Lord has given my family." Naboth is pious.

The prodigal son is not. He didn't care about anyone or anything except himself. In the process, he has insulted his father, his God, and his whole family.

The elder son has cause to be upset. He did the right thing in his life. He worked his portion of the inheritance, his two thirds of the property for his father. He suffered through his brother's indifference and willful rejection of their father. And nothing gets us angrier than when someone offends our loved one. The elder son has cause to be angry with his brother. But he himself errs by letting this anger control him.

A banquet is thrown, and the elder son refuses to join the celebration. The Father who was offended has forgiven the prodigal, but the elder son refuses to forgive. In scripture a banquet is a way of expressing the intimate sharing of God's life. God will love his people so much that he will set a banquet for them, bringing them into his intimacy, the Old Testament says. The elder son separates himself from the intimacy of his father's love because he refuses to forgive his brother. We separate ourselves from the intimacy of God's love when we refuse to forgive others who have sinned against us.

We all have battle stories. We all have had people who deliberately and callously tried to hurt us. But if we don't forgive those who have hurt us, we willfully shut ourselves out from the banquet of God's intimacy. If we want to receive God's forgiveness, we have to give God's forgiveness. If we don't, then we stand outside the banquet door, griping and grouching, separating ourselves from God's love. At the conclusion of the parable, only the elder son is excluded from the banquet. It is a loss he has chosen for himself.

Today we pray that we might be like the forgiving Father, not like the elder son. We pray that we may live the words we say when we recite the Our Father: 'Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us'.

Suggested Personal Reflection Guide:

1. When was the last time we really went before God to seek his forgiveness for the many unconfessed sins that we have kept in our hearts?
2. Have we truly forgiven those who have wronged us?
3. How do we intend to extend our forgiveness to those who wronged us and, in the same manner, how do we intend to seek forgiveness from those whom we have wronged?

Next Week's Daily Mass Reading Guide:

March 15, 2010 (Mon):	Is 65:17-21; Ps 30:2, 4-6, 11-13; Jn 4:43-54
March 16 2010 (Tue):	Ez 47:1-9, 12; Ps 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9; Jn 5:1-16
March 17, 2010 (Wed):	Is 49:8-Is 49:8-15; Ps 145:8-9, 13-14, 17-19; Jn 5:17-30
March 18, 2010 (Thur):	Ex 32:7-14; Ps 106:19-23; Jn 5:31-47
March 19, 2010 (Fri):	2 Sm 7:4-5, 12-14, 16; Ps 89:2-5, 27, 29; Rom 4:13, 16-18, 22; Mt 1:16, 18-21, 24 or Lk 2:41-51
March 20, 2010 (Sat):	Jer 11:18-20; Ps 7:2-3, 9-12; Jn 7:40-53

"Ignorance of the Bible is ignorance of Christ. Read your Bible daily!"