

Fourth Sunday of Lent

The Fourth Sunday of Lent (cycle c)

March 31, 2019

Fr. Max Oliva, S.J.

A) “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.”

Words of the younger son to his father in the Gospel reading today in the Parable of the Prodigal Son:

Who among us has not uttered these words – or words like them – at some point in our life? I know I have.

This is what Confession – the Sacrament of Reconciliation – is all about. In humility and sorrow, we bring our morally wounded self to the Father, trusting in His love and mercy; trusting that no one is outside God’s mercy. And what are we seeking in addition to forgiveness for our sins?

Reconciliation:

From sin to grace

From shame to inner freedom

From our old, false, self to our true, Christ-like self (St. Paul’s “new creation.”)

From alienation to friendship

B) For the Hebrew people, the possession of the land was a symbol of reconciliation, after their time of alienation from God, in Egypt. Egypt was the symbol of separation. The Exodus and Covenant restored the relationship, as we heard in the First Reading from the Book of Joshua.

To paraphrase the Psalm:

The Israelites sought the Lord,
in their bondage, and the Lord delivered them.’

C) Reconciliation presupposes that a relationship existed, that it was broken or weakened, and that given certain circumstances or conditions, it can be restored. This is what the younger son in the Parable experienced. He experienced the ‘prodigal love’ of his father, who not only, and without hesitation, ran to greet his wayward son but also embraced and kissed him. And much to the dismay of his older brother, threw a party for the younger son!

“Let us celebrate,” the father exclaims, because this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost (morally) and has been found.”

The Parable, of course, is about God the Father and you and me. There is joy in Heaven every time we seek forgiveness. Every time, in humility, we recognize our need for God's mercy and seek it. The Parable helps us, in Pope Benedict's words, "helps us to know God's heart." A heart of love, compassion, and mercy.

D) Reconciliation goes beyond our being forgiven. It means sharing the peace and the healing we have received with others. St. Paul puts it clearly in our Second Reading: "we have been given the ministry of reconciliation; we are ambassadors for Christ, God appealing to others through us."

One way to do this: take the first step when a relationship has been damaged, no matter who is at fault. I have learned how to do this in the Jesuits. It may mean swallowing your pride. The focus is not on who caused the rift, it's on healing it. With God's help.

CONCLUSION

Here are three questions to think about:

How have you worked to heal wounds, to bring about reconciliation?

What keeps you from being a 'minister of reconciliation'?

What helps you?

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