

**The Parable of “the Prodigal Son”
(4th Sunday of Lent, Year C)**

Joshua 5:9, 10-12: The Passover and the Entry into the Promised Land

1. Exodus Ends: with crossing of Jordan River and Passover (Joshua 4-5; cf. Exod 12-14)

Psalm 34—Taste and See the Goodness of the Lord

1. Savior: “taste and see the LORD is good, happy the man who takes refuge...” (v. 6)

2 Corinthians 5:17-21—A “New Creation” in Christ

1. New Creation: “if anyone is *in Christ*, he is a new creation (Gk *kainē ktisis*)” (5:17)

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32—The Parable of the “Lost Son”

1. Name of Parable?
 - a. “Prodigal Son” = emphasis on sin of the Son (Common Name)
 - b. “Merciful Father” = emphasis on God’s mercy (cf. Luke 6:36; P. Gadenz)
 - c. “Two Sons” = emphasis on contrast b/w elder and younger son (J. Ratzinger)
 - d. “Lost Son” = emphasis on predicament of Son (B. Pitre; cf. Luke 15:4-10)
2. The Departure of the Younger Son:
 - a. Inheritance: “Father, give me the share of property that falls to me” (15:12)
 - b. Exile: younger son journeys to “a far country” (15:13)
 - c. Sin: “squandered his property in loose living” (15:13)
 - d. Suffering: “a great famine arose in that country” (15:14)
 - e. Uncleanness/Gentile: “feed swine”—unclean animals! (cf. Lev 11:7-8)
3. The Return of the Lost Son:
 - a. Self-Knowledge: “when he came to himself” (15:17)
 - b. Repentance/Confession: “Father, I have sinned against heaven...” (15:18)
 - c. Slavery vs. Sonship: “I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (15:21)
4. The Response of the Father:
 - a. Searching: “he was yet at a distance, his father saw him...” (15:20)
 - b. Mercy: he “had compassion” (Greek *esplangnisthē*) (15:20)
 - c. Joy: “he ran and embraced him and kissed him” (15:20)
 - d. Best Robe: garment of the favored Son and heir (cf. Joseph; Gen 37:1-4)
 - e. Death/Resurrection: “my son was dead, and is alive again” (15:24)
 - f. Exile/Return: “he was lost, and is found” (15:24)
6. Response of the Elder Son:
 - a. Working: “he was in the field” (15:25)
 - b. Anger: “he was angry and refused to go in” (15:28)
 - c. Slave: “these many years I have served you...” (15:29)
 - d. Separation: “this son of yours...” (15:30)
 - e. Covenant: “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours” (15:31)

The Popes on the Prodigal Son

John Paul II: Although the word "mercy" does not appear [in the Prodigal Son], it nevertheless expresses the essence of the divine mercy in a particularly clear way. (John Paul II, *The Mercy of God*, no. 5)

Pope Francis on Reconciliation: Confessors should be the Father in the Parable

Pope Francis: Let us never forget that to be confessors means to participate in the very mission of Jesus to be a concrete sign of the constancy of divine love that pardons and saves... *Every confessor must accept the faithful as the father in the parable of the prodigal son: a father who runs out to meet his son despite the fact that he has squandered away his inheritance.* Confessors are called to embrace the repentant son who comes back home and to express the joy of having him back again.... *May confessors not ask useless questions, but like the father in the parable, interrupt the speech prepared ahead of time by the prodigal son, so that confessors will learn to accept the plea for help and mercy pouring from the heart of every penitent.* In short, confessors are called to be a sign of the primacy of mercy always, everywhere, and in every situation, no matter what. (Pope Francis, *The Face of Mercy*, no. 17)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (4th Sunday of Lent, Year B)

1. Why does the Church give us the story of Joshua and the Israelites' entry into the Promised Land on the 5th week of Lent?

2. What is the best name for the Parable commonly known as the "Prodigal Son"? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each title?

3. Why does the Church give us the Parable of the Prodigal Son on the 4th Week of Lent?

For Further Study

1. Pablo Gadenz. *The Gospel of Luke*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 273-80.
2. Arthur A. Just, Jr. *Luke*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament III. Downers Grove: IVP, 2003. Pp. 246-53.