

## **HOMILY for 4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY of LENT – Year C**

There was a very strict order of monks who lived by a rule that permitted speaking only once on one day a year, one monk per year. When the day came around, the monk whose turn it was stood up & said, “I don’t like the mashed potatoes here, they’re too lumpy.” And he sat down.

A year later, another monk stood up & said, “I rather like mashed potatoes here, they’re very tasty.”

Another year went by & it was a third monk’s turn. He stood up & said, “I’m leaving the monastery. I can’t stand this constant bickering.”

Arguments like that happen to us every day. For we all have our own opinions & different ways of doing things. Because of those differences, arguments & fights often erupt all around us. Sometimes they happen due to some misunderstanding. But, the fact is that we are all different from one another; & our life choices might cause some friction with our neighbors. We step on each other easily & say hurtful things to our loved ones at times. Naturally, we have disagreements & strong feelings against some people. In fact, the whole world is on fire & fueled with hate & anger lately. But, we cannot live in that kind of environment forever.

I dreamt to come America like most immigrants because I wanted to live in a peaceful, happy world. I wanted to run away from a war-torn, Communist repressive country like Viet Nam. Unfortunately, I’ve seen how America has deteriorated in its treatment of one another & the neighbors over the years. Everyone is constantly at war with each other over all sorts of issues these days. Our leaders are the worst offenders as they try to stir up more problems to tear our American society apart. I do not see any of them want to make personal sacrifices & try to build up a harmonious & caring world. That is why we’ve seen violence & hate rising at an alarm rate. Our Lord is very concerned about it. Because of that, the Readings for this Sunday want us to consider seriously the issue of reconciliation & learn to build up a peaceful world as a member of God’s family.

We sure have heard this Gospel lots of times before. It’s about a dysfunctional family whose children could not get along & ended up tearing it apart. First, the youngest son came home one day & demanded his father to give him a share of the estate. We all know that estate/bequest sharing only happens after its owner died. But, suddenly the youngest son came home one day & demanded his living father to give him his share of the estate. Then he left home, abandoned his father, & squandered all of it. He went broke & faced tough time. As he reflected on his father’s mercy & abundance of resources, he decided to go home & reconcile with him. His father did not hesitate a moment to forgive his prodigal son & welcome him home.

What surprised the entire family the most was a big welcoming-home party that the prodigal son received from his father. Everyone could not believe to see how happy & appreciative the father was to reconcile & bring home his lost son. But, what everyone did not realize is that another relationship needs to be reconciled, namely, the relationship between the two brothers. After refusing to enter the home, the oldest son shared this grievance, “For years now, I have slaved for you. I never disobeyed one of your orders, yet you never gave me so much as a kid goat to celebrate with my friends. Then, when this son of yours returns after having gone through your property with loose women, you kill the fattened calf for him.” As

you might recall, the story of the Prodigal Son ends with the reconciliation between the sinful son & his father. But, it leaves us wondering about the reconciliation between the two brothers, or the one between the good son & his father. You might think the story of the Prodigal Son is done with a happy ending as the bad son comes home to reconcile with his father. That happy ending might be the first goal for us this Lenten season. For we are called to leave behind our bad past & come home to the Lord. That is how we can appreciate His love & mercy for us through His desire to reconcile with us. His Cross is the ultimate sign for that.

However, that is not the ending of the Prodigal Son story. As I reflect further on it, I see that the story purposely leaves us wondering about the reconciliation between the two brothers, or the one between the good son & his father. These two reconciliations are much harder to accomplish than the one of a sinful person with God. For we have seen how our world has struggled to reconcile with one another since the fight between Cain & Abel in the beginning of humanity. Conflict in the Holy Land has raged on in the last two thousand years. In addition to that, we have seen thousands of wars happen on our seven continents throughout our human history. A lot of small fights pop up every day in families, work places, neighborhoods, & the world. In fact, we have seen one of the horrible wars going on right now in Ukraine. There is no sign that Russia is going to reconcile with Ukraine & sign a peace treaty any time soon. Forgiveness & reconciliation between two people is not that easy in reality. It takes lots of personal sacrifices & humility on both sides to make it happen. I know it personally because I have had to leave everything behind after the Viet Nam War & exchange for peace in myself & my homeland. Otherwise, that civil war would go on till now if I still want to fight & kill my enemies – the Communists. Personal sacrifices & humility is the only solution for a reconciliation to happen between two people.

The Gospel story still leaves with us another reconciliation to be worked out, namely, the one between the good son & his father. This son thinks that his father is a softy, or a sold-out. He wants his father to be tougher & more judgmental on his brother. Sadly, that is the attitude I have seen in many good Catholics & Christians. They want the Church to be tougher on sinners, throw more rules at them, & condemn them without any mercy. I wonder if those Catholics/Christians have ever found themselves asking for mercy from someone before, or perhaps God on the Last Day. They might think rules & punishments are what God wants us to use in dealing with one another. But, that is not what we hear from the father in today's Gospel story, or what we are expected to live by in this life.

My dear brothers & sisters, what message have you heard from the Prodigal Son story in today's Gospel? If you were the head of a household like that father who desperately desires his sons to reconcile with him & with one another, what would you do? So, be merciful to one another & seek reconciliation as God the Father is merciful to us.