

HOMILY for 4th SUNDAY of LENT – Year C

This Sunday's Gospel talks about two brothers with the younger one being the problem child. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute that I'd like to share with you.

In a certain suburban neighborhood, there were two brothers, eight & ten years old, who were exceedingly mischievous. Whatever went wrong in the neighborhood, it nearly always turned out they had a hand in it. Their parents were at their wits' end trying to control them; & after hearing about a priest nearby who worked with delinquent boys, the mother suggested to that father that they ask the priest to talk to them.

The mother went to the priest & made her request. He agreed, said that he wanted to see the younger boy first & alone. So, the mother sent him to the priest. The priest set the boy down across from the huge, impressive desk he sat behind. For about five minutes, they just sat & stared at each other. Finally the priest pointed his forefinger at the boy & asked, "Where is God?" The boy looked under the desk, in the corners of the room, all around, but said nothing.

Again, louder, the priest pointed at the boy & asked, "Where is God?" Again, the boy looked all around but said nothing. A third time, in a louder, firmer voice, the priest leaned far across the desk & put his forefinger almost to the boy's nose, & asked, "Where is God?"

The boy panicked & ran all the way home. Finding his older brother, he dragged him upstairs to their room & into the closet, where they usually plotted their mischief & quickly said, "We are in trouble, bro!" The older boy asked, "What do you mean, big trouble?" His younger brother replied, "God is missing & they think we did it!"

God might be missing in that cute story. But, God's mercy is actually missing in our current world. Everywhere we look these days, God's mercy seems to be missing. People might claim themselves to believe in God, but they don't seem to reflect the divine qualities such as God's mercy in their lives. Our country might brag about being a Christian nation, but the way it lives & treats one another does not show what its Christian leader Jesus really stands for on the Cross. In fact, some Catholics have searched for various ways to prove that they are traditional & conservative, but they have failed to show the world the core message that Jesus preached all His life, namely, mercy & reconciliation. No wonder why our Church continues to have infighting & division. The same thing is true with our country, & our world. But, believe it or not, the story in this Sunday's Gospel can offer our Church, our country, & our world a real solution for its current problem.

We've all heard about the story of the Prodigal Son. In fact, people often quote this story to talk about someone who lived a dissolute life finally finds his/her way back home after going through a personal conversion. Some of us might take the side of the older son who always followed the rules & did the right things all his life while others could relate to the younger son who loved to rebel & messed up everything in his life but finally converted. A few of us might identify with the merciful & forgiving father & try to reach out to people like the younger son in spite of their sinfulness.

People who side with the older son usually obey all the rules & find it difficult to welcome back sinful members of the community like the younger son. They often do not want to show any mercy or bend any rule to have any lost sheep come back to the fold. They do not think that it is fair to give a sinner another chance after they themselves have been faithful to the rules all their lives. Besides, the sinful member might pretend to change & then go back to

his/her old habits. That is how the early Church felt about St. Paul's conversion & was afraid that he might turn on them. In any case, the older son expressed his opposition in this Sunday's Gospel as following, "...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 fatted calf for him." We can see that the older son felt that he was treated unfairly while the sinful younger son was given the royal treatment after abandoning his father & committing all sorts of terrible sins.

However, people who sympathize with the younger son & his tough life at the end would try to forgive his past sins & give him a second chance. They know about our human sinfulness & want to imitate our God by learning to forgive others every chance possible. They realize that they would have to go out on the limb to reconcile with someone, but trust that God would have to take care of the rest & make it happen. They certainly love to hear the admission of a sinner to God in this Sunday's Gospel, "Father, I have sinned against God & against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired hands." Believe it or not, God wants to hear that admission from our world as much as possible this Lent. God needs us to make that conversion happen for Him every day.

If we think that God would like to hear the admission of the younger son more often, listen to what the Father tells his older son, "My son, you are with me always, & everything I have is yours. But, we have to celebrate & rejoice! This brother of yours was dead, & has come back to life. He was lost, & is found." Basically he begs his older son to consider the conversion moment as the Resurrection moment/the Easter miracle. He admonishes him to put aside past sins & old grudges, including the cost of the party, & celebrate this historical moment. This is what I talk about at the beginning of this homily. Our Church, our country, & our world must learn to promote & search for moments of conversion to celebrate like God the Father would want it to every day. It needs to bury the hatchets & stop all the infighting & division if it want to build a peaceful & prosperous community. That is the real lesson of the Prodigal Son story. That is the real solution for the current problem with our Church, our country, & our world.

My dear brothers & sisters, St. Paul in today's Second Reading reminds us, "...God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting our human transgressions against them, & that He has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us. This makes us ambassadors for Christ... We implore you, in Christ's name: Be reconciled to God!" So, St. Paul evidently implores us to be reconciled to God & one another. He calls us to have the merciful heart of God & the father in today's Gospel. If we can have the merciful heart & a reconciling attitude, we will be able to stop all the current infighting & division in our Church, our country, & our world. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Let's make that happen; & let it begin with us by having a merciful heart & a reconciling attitude ourselves.