

Fourth Sunday of Lent



Bring Us to Our Senses

God, the source of all compassion,
you who wait for us,
like the father in Jesus's parable,
help us recognize
when we squander our finest selves.
Bring us to our senses
when we wander far into exile.
Strengthen our first feeble steps back
to healing.

Welcome us into your embrace
if we've been gone too long.
And as you did the elder brother,
quiet our resistance
when we refuse to join the celebration.
We ask this through our Lord
Jesus Christ,
your Son, who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Sunday March 10, 2013

Which Way In?

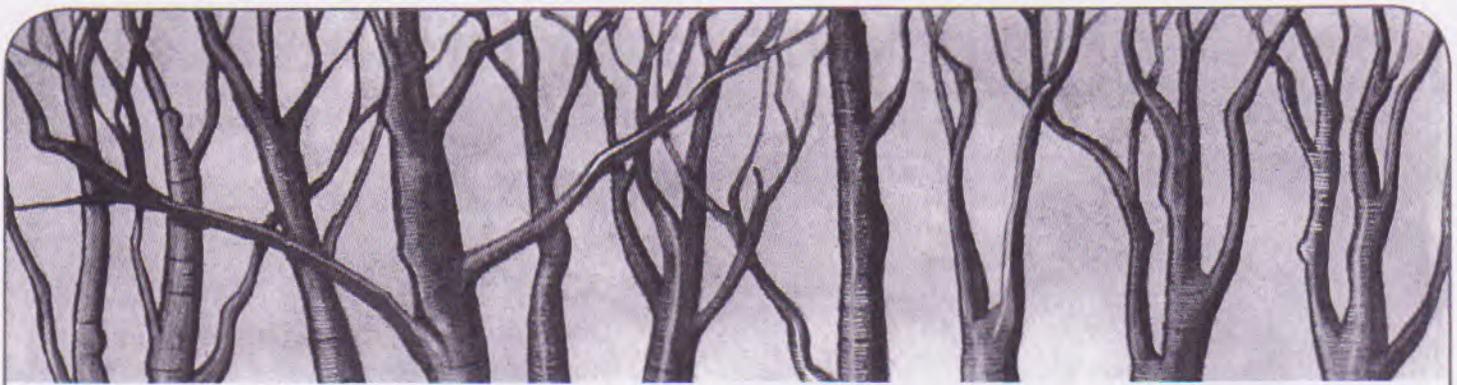
Today's Readings: Joshua 5:9a, 10-12; Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7 (9a); 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32. There are many ways of entering one of Jesus's most beloved parables. One way in asks with which character we identify. Frustrated with the family, do we long for escape and fantasize about the pleasures of a "distant country"? Do we seek to reconcile, alert to the possibility of homecoming? Or do we resent those who enjoy favor without the back-breaking work *we've* endured?

Another entry point is: which road are we pursuing? Are we headed into exile, seeking instant gratification, regardless of how it harms relationships, bank accounts, diets, or resolves? Have we hit bottom, envying the pigs their husks? Are we coming to our senses, taking tentative steps towards health and healing? Are we celebrating at home, confident in

the father's welcome, relieved to be where we belong? Or are we annoyed by freeloaders slipping into the kingdom through God's generosity, on no merit of their own? Perhaps we're confused, on several roads at once. Which one leads into the father's embrace?

A final approach is to see where our attention is riveted. Do we wallow in the younger son's punishment for his arrogance? Do we bask in the forgiving father, watching the horizon for his son's return? Or do we side with the older son, proud of the committees we've chaired, the charity work we've done, the idiots we've endured, the evildoers we've avoided?

Many questions: may one open into the forgiving heart of God.



This Week at Home

Monday, March 11

Examining Prayer Styles

In today's Gospel, notice how directly the royal official states his longing: "Sir, come down before my little boy dies." He must have enormous trust in Jesus's word because without any proof of healing, he "started on his way." What can we learn from him about directness and confidence in prayer? Today's Readings: Isaiah 65:17-21; Psalm 30:2 and 4, 5-6, 11-12a and 13b (2a); John 4:43-54.

Tuesday, March 12

Not the Obvious Answer

The invalid never answers Jesus's question, "Do you want to be made well?" How would we answer? While "yes" may seem obvious, sometimes people trapped in unhealthy situations fail to recognize the pay-offs that hold them. Some enjoy the "victim" stance, others like attention, and still others are shackled by inertia. What challenges might the cured person in today's Gospel encounter after thirty-eight years? What challenges might you meet if you were cured? Today's Readings: Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; Psalm 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9 (8); John 5:1-16.

Wednesday, March 13

Bringing Spirituality to Work

When Jesus says, "My Father is still working, and I also am working" (17), he recalls the creativity of Genesis. God, who made the oceans, mountains, animals, and people, has not ceased activity. God continues to stir the waters of creation. This is a good day to examine your work. Even when you aren't doing direct service, how is the workplace holy? How are you a sign of God's presence in a home, school, bank, post office, store, or office? The Second Vatican Council called the laity to be Christ's presence in churches (proclaiming, singing, teaching, and so forth), and also in the world of work, doing a good job with skill and integrity. Today's Readings: Isaiah 49:8-15; Psalm 145:8-9, 13cd-14, 17-18 (8a); John 5:17-30.

Thursday, March 14

Whose Affirmation?

In today's Gospel Jesus says, "the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf" (36). He needs no elaborate words; he simply points to the testimony of his life. Could we say the same? Or do we need words to disguise non-action? Jesus then asks, "How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?" (44) Are we so quick to seek human applause that we do not spend time in quiet, listening for God's affirmation, the only one that counts? Today's Readings: Exodus 32:7-14; Psalm 106:19-20, 21-22, 23 (4a); John 5:31-47.

Friday, March 15

Here Comes Uncertainty!

Confronting a divine mystery, the people of today's Gospel argue, question authority, categorize, check origins and credentials, and demonize (20). The resulting frustration can almost be heard in Jesus's voice. He wants to give a gift: they want to fit him into a neat mental construct. Have any recent experiences moved beyond your own established frameworks? How did you receive them? Today, ask for grace to welcome surprises. Today's Readings: Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22; Psalm 34:17-18, 19-20, 21 and 23 (19a); John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30.

Saturday, March 16

Two Tell It Like It Is

Nicodemus's voice pops into today's discussion with clarity and fairness. The other honest comment comes from Temple police: "Never has anyone spoken like this!" The Pharisees don't want to hear either voice, and threaten the speakers that they've been deceived, or fallen under Jesus's influence. They want to slam the door on this teacher who doesn't fit any preconceived boxes. The Gospel invites personal reflection. With whom do we identify? Would we express honest awe, even for an unorthodox preacher? Or would we be uncomfortable with the unusual? The best theology invites us into mystery. Today's Readings: Jeremiah 11:18-20; Psalm 7:2-3, 9bc-10, 11-12 (2a); John 7:40-53.

