

Today's themes are simple

Rejoice and joy!

At the halfway point of Lent

We see the light of Christ through the violet of penance

In the rose vestments we see a glimpse of Easter joy

Not yet in its fullness

But like the disciples at the Transfiguration

We get a glimpse of the glory that will come

And behind this rejoicing is repentance

Something we are called to as individuals

But something our world is called to as well

Something our Church is called into

Because all of creation has been inflicted through the fall

The sin of Adam and Eve touches everyone and everything

In our reading of Salvation History

We see the Israelites coming to an end of their wandering

They had been in the wilderness for forty years

God has not abandoned them

He has been with them every step of the way

Even providing manna from heaven for their daily nourishment

They are no longer slaves

They are free to worship God openly and freely

They would now eat off the land God gave them

This doesn't mean they will not have to work

But the work they do will be as a free people

A people that could now put down roots

**They celebrated by worshiping God with their first Passover in
the Promised Land**

St Paul tells us that our repentance makes us new creatures in Christ

Something the Israelites could not offer

They had only animal sacrifices to make atonement for their sins

They were brought to the Promised Land so they could be beacons

Showing other nations how to live lives pleasing to God

We are called to be ambassadors of Christ

Bringing his message of reconciliation and mercy to the world

Christ is the perfect sin offering

We enter into his sacrifice

Not with animal sacrifices of our own

But with meek and humble hearts

Offering to God a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving

As He calls us to

This is why we come together on Sundays

Not because we cannot find God in nature

But because Christ calls us to *'Do this in remembrance of me'*

Christ himself gives us the worship that pleases God

To join our sacrifices and our joys

Big and small to his sacrifice

And to consume his body and blood

So we can be reconciled to God

And be his ambassadors to those not with us

Reconciliation and mercy are at the heart of this parable today

We need to set the stage for a better understanding

Jesus is speaking with tax collectors and sinners

The Pharisees and Scribes are hanging around complaining as well

This man receives sinners and eats with them

So Jesus gives them 3 parables

The first is the parable of the lost sheep

The second is the parable of the lost coin

This is the parable of the lost son

But there is so much more going on

First, what does *'Prodigal'* mean?

It is not a word we use every day, so let's look at its roots

From Latin, *pro* means to forth

And *agree*: to drive

So this term speaks of one that drives forth his money

One that spends with reckless abandon

Exactly what the younger son does

We also need to understand Jewish traditions

The first son gets the bulk of the inheritance

Typically a double share

So here the younger son is asking for his third of the property

Most of the father's wealth would be held in property, not cash

Something that would be divided upon the death of the father

So the younger son is telling his dad

'I don't need you'

'You are dead to me, give me what is mine'

How would most of us handle a similar request?

But the father does not respond as we think

Even as justice might demand

He does what God does, he gives

God gives to us as well

Each time we sin, we are telling God we don't need Him

We are good to go on our own

And out of respect for the freedom He has given us

God lets us go

He doesn't give up on us, even when we misuse the gift of freedom

So the son sells his property

Turning his ancestral inheritance into cash

And then he leaves the country

He does not want to be reminded of what he has done

He wants nothing to do with his religion

Nor those that might remind him of what he has done

He goes off to a pagan land

And squanders his wealth

He then humiliated himself by turning to a pagan for work

He humiliated himself again by being sent to tend the swine

An unclean animal for the Jews

He was humiliated that the pigs were better off than him

And he was humiliated that no one would offer him anything

Not even the pigs slop

So he comes to his senses I will return to my father

I have sinned against heaven and against you

Call me not your son, but your servant

So he goes home

And before he can even arrive, his father spots him

And runs to him

A humiliation for the father, because this was not something a father would do

Normally, if a son returned after something like this

The father would stand with his back to the door

Another would state his son wanted to see him

And the father would reply *my son is dead*

But the father does what our Heavenly Father does

He embraces his son and calls for a celebration

He will not treat him as a servant; he treats him as a son

Rejoicing, music, dancing; because this son of mine was dead

And is alive again

Next we see the older son

Coming in, he is told what has happened

And he resents his brother

Refusing to come in; so the father goes to him as well

The older brother sees an injustice

The father sees only love

You are with me always

Everything I have is yours

But we have to rejoice that your brother has returned safe

We have this parable so we can find ourselves in it

In the young son, in the older son and in the father

We are children of God

Yet we can be lost through sin, even mortal sin

Turning our backs on our Heavenly Father through our own free will

But we still have free will, and we can turn back

When we come before him with a humble spirit and a contrite heart

He welcomes us with open arms

And when we see brothers and sisters that have returned

We, too, are called to welcome them, and rejoice

The Church is a hospital for sinners

And a sanctuary for saints

We are called to live what John Paul called the law of the gift

God simply gives, it is who He is

We are material and spiritual beings

St Thomas Aquinas teaches that we recognize the gifts we have

Our talents, our treasure and our time

These are undeserved gifts from God

We recognize we have these gifts; then we get confused

We try to hoard them for ourselves

As if they were money or a material thing

This is the older brother

He thinks if his father loves his little brother

There will be less for him

But the law of the Gift states that these spiritual realities

Joy, mercy, wisdom, love

These increase when they are given away

When we are reconciled with God, these are increased in our hearts and souls

We are changed

And we become Christ's ambassadors

Working to be a means of reconciliation for our brothers and sisters

Imitating the father

Removing obstacles and restoring right relationships

So no matter where we find ourselves at the moment

One thing will shine into our lives

And through us into the world

The Mercy of a loving Father

Who so loved the world

He gave His only Son