

Homily Notes for 4th Sunday of Lent, C

Scripture lessons: Josh 5:9, 10-12; II Cor. 5: 17-21; Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

We rejoice in a God who wishes good for us and wishes to bless us.

1. In the first reading, the Chosen People of God are portrayed as celebrating, for the first time in their own land, the feast of their freedom, by using wheat that had grown in the Promised Land. Theirs is a joy of promises fulfilled.

2. In today's psalm, a rejoicing psalmist invites us, "*Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.*"

3. In the second reading, St. Paul invites the Corinthian Christian community to rejoice because Jesus has reconciled them with God by his suffering and death.

4. Today's gospel celebrates the joy of the prodigal son on his "homecoming" to rediscover his father's forgiving and overflowing love. It is also the story of the rejoicing of a loving and forgiving father who celebrates the return of his prodigal son by throwing a big party in his honor, a banquet celebrating the reconciliation of the son with his father, his family, his community and his God. At the same time, by presenting a self-righteous elder brother, the parable reminds us not to be rigid and judgmental when one who has fallen away returns. We should recognize ourselves to be an assembly of sinful people, ready to receive God's forgiveness and to experience Jesus' Personal Presence in the Holy Eucharist as a loving and forgiving God.

5. Life messages:

6). Let us return to our Heavenly Father with repentant hearts: As prodigal children. Is it not true that we are facing a spiritual famine all around us in the form of drug and alcohol abuse, fraud and theft in the workplace, murders, abortions and violence, premarital sex, marital infidelity and priestly infidelity, as well as in suicide. Why do you think that all of these evils have proliferated? Have we been active as Christians in witness, testimony and service? Or have we been squandering God's abundant blessings, not only in our country and in our families, but also in our personal lives. Hence, let us repent and return to our heavenly Father's home.

7. Let us "be church", not just "come to church." On this Sunday that means knowing how to encourage and help people to rejoice and know that "the Lord is good." How important is encouragement!

8. A big problem getting bigger, suicide. Let's look at a current news article concerning us in East Texas and Smith County. The Psychology Club and the campus chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness teamed up last week (Mar. 26) to sponsor the annual walk for Suicide Awareness. Last year a U. T. survey showed that Smith County had the highest suicide rate of the top 25 most populous counties in Texas. How is the best way to deal with this trend? Certainly mental health awareness is important. But could it be that genuine faith in God and awareness of his mercy and his guidance could even be more powerful?

9. How can faith help us and especially those who are most discouraged or depressed?

10. First, we remember that a very personal God gave us life and has a wonderful plan for our lives. We also know that to take one's own life would be to break the fifth commandment and incur God's wrath.

11. At the same time we must remember that there is no unforgiveable sin. There may be conditions or experiences forced on a person that make them responsible for their own actions. We always need to pray for all who have died, that God might have mercy on their souls. We remember the words of the Mass. "Lord, look not on our sins but upon the faith of the Church." This is why I, whenever I have a particularly tragic funeral, I hand out the little brochures that show how to pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy or the Holy Rosary and ask everyone to pray for the deceased, that God might have mercy upon them.

12. But, secondly, we know that if we put our faith in Him, he will grant us his forgiveness and restore us. We must encourage others that if they will push through the difficulty, asking God for help, he will always respond. Let us remember 1 Cor 10:13:

"No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it."

13. How easy is it to find that way out? Are we always able to find it ourselves? Might we need counsel and guidance? But so many times I have seen, after the difficulty and the creative thought it involved, people came out both more mature and better off. God always wishes the best for us.

14. Third, if we are active Christians, we are part of a Church which can help us find the way out. As Matthew Kelly said in "Resisting Happiness", "Everyone has something going on inside" (ch. 5, pp 18ff). In our Church there are many people who can give us encouragement and support, often providing advice to overcome immediate needs and problems. How important it is to make time for people to share and to talk! Furthermore, At St. Boniface and St. Edwards we have the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Its president, our own Robert Fletcher, is very knowledgeable of many community and county resources that can be very helpful. God wishes to provide his blessings through his Church, his people.

15. Finally, I wish to give personal testimony. Sometimes our situation seems very dark, even black. But if we have faith and continue searching we can always come out in a good place, even if that seems impossible at the time. There is always hope. There are always other possibilities. Let us search together and support each other for God's blessings.

16. The challenge is for us to "be church", not just "go to church."