### **Readings for March 30, 2025 -- Fourth Sunday in Lent**

The Desert of Separation

### *The parable of the Prodigal Son shows us the sadness of life when we are isolated and separated from others, and from God, because of our sinful choices. Thankfully, God always welcomes us joyfully out of our deserts of separation, and toward becoming a “new creation,” as St. Paul reminds us in the second reading.*

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### **Opening Prayer:** Open our hearts and minds today, Oh Lord. Teach us what you want us to know, and thank you for giving us parables that show us who you are, and how much you love us and want to bring us home with you. Amen.

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#### **Reading 1****[JOS 5:9A, 10-12](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/bible/Joshua/5%3A9)**

The LORD said to Joshua,

“Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you.”

While the Israelites were encamped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho,

they celebrated the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth of the month.

On the day after the Passover, they ate of the produce of the land

in the form of unleavened cakes and parched grain. On that same day after the Passover,

on which they ate of the produce of the land, the manna ceased.

No longer was there manna for the Israelites, who that year ate of the yield of the land of Canaan.

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#### **Responsorial Psalm [PS 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7.](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/bible/Psalms/34%3A2)**

R. (9a) **Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.**

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth.

Let my soul glory in the LORD; the lowly will hear me and be glad.

R. **Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.**

Glorify the LORD with me,let us together extol his name.

I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

R. **Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.**

Look to him that you may be radiant with joy, and your faces may not blush with shame.

When the poor one called out, the LORD heard, and from all his distress he saved him.

R. **Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.**

#### **Reading 2 [2 COR 5:17-21](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/bible/2Corinthians/5%3A17)**

Brothers and sisters: Whoever is in Christ is a new creation:

the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.

And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ

and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,

not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us.

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

#### **Gospel****[LK 15:1-3, 11-32](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/bible/luke/15%3A1)**

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, “this man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

So to them Jesus addressed this parable: “A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father,

‘Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’

 So the father divided the property between them.

After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country

where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.

When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country,

and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens

who sent him to his farm to tend the swine.

And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any.

Coming to his senses he thought, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers

have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger.

I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him,

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.”’

So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off,

his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion.

He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.

His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you;

I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But his father ordered his servants,

‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast,

because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’

Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field

and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing.

He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him,

‘Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf

because he has him back safe and sound.’ He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house,

his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply,

‘Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders;

yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends.

But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes,

for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’ He said to him, ‘My son, you are here with me always;

everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice,

because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’”

Related Reflections

**From Fr. John Foley, S.J.**

Pay very close attention to the father in the parable. He spots his prodigal son far down the road still going over his lines. Does the father fold his arms and put on an angry face? Not at all. He sets out running. See them meet, enveloped by the thirsty road dust. They embrace and the father kisses his son. The boy blunders out his lines, “I have sinned terribly, I am no longer worthy of…” His father drowns him out, calling for the finest robe in the house, a ring for the young man’s finger, sandals for his feet, and a huge banquet of celebration. He is ecstatic that his son came home. Apply that now to you and me. Our own shame says, “Father, I am a no-good. I am totally unworthy.” Of course we assume God is angry.

“I know what you have done, child,” says God. “You needn’t cower. You are precious to me, and not because you never sin. Come, come have back your brothers, sisters, neighbors, and most of all, your Father. Let me hug you.” Because he holds us so close to his heart, God is most willing to absorb the losses we inflict. Even if we were to join forces with evil in the world, God would wait and pray and welcome us back, sins and all, with open arms. Notice that Jesus’ arms are wide open on the cross.

 (www.liturgy.slu.edu)

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“Come home. Please…just come home. Forget the mistakes you have made along the way. Let them go. Don’t let them separate us anymore. I want you home.” What parent, who deeply loves his or her child, would not echo this sentiment of the prodigal father, who heartily welcomes the return of the wayward son? Jealousy and resentment lock up the older son, who has given so much to the father in daily fidelity. But the father sees the errant young man and simply goes to the heart of the issue: welcome home!

We resonate with different characters of this story throughout our lives. In youth we may understand the gambling young man who experiments with life and risks it all. Later on, after years of toil and sweat, we may identify more with the older son, critical of the behavior of others. Finally, in our elder years, we may stand in the shoes of a seasoned parent, who puts aside obstacles and merely wants loved ones close. God asks us to love always, regardless of circumstances.

Our experience of God may go through similar transitions. Our images of God can become transformed gradually in our human encounters throughout life. Gradually, we discover the generosity of God, the hospitality of One who yearns for us to come home. This can affect the way we treat ourselves, too. Slowly, if we let it, the experience will bring us to forgive ourselves of shortsightedness in our choices, of resistance to reconciliation, and of distance from God. What is important will change. We want to rest in the arms of our Father. This is what matters. All we desire is to be at home with God.

*Prayer Time, Cycle C: Reflections on the Sunday Gospels* (Renew International)

**Stirring up the memory of God’s love:** When the Prodigal Son left, the father was not angry. Had the father chosen shouting and violence instead of a gift, the son would not have wanted to return. As it happened, the son still came to believe the lie that his father would not take him back—that their relationship would never again be what it once was. At that moment, the father wanted his son to remember how he had blessed him with an enormous inheritance, rather than becoming angry when he left. Even if his son did not realize the full import of that gift, the father was hoping that his son’s heart would stir up the memory of the love and mercy that the father showed him at the moment of his apparently final rejection. The father hoped the son would recognize, in his gut, *My old man loves me*. *All this time, I had him wrong.* And the beautiful part of the story is, the son’s old man was right.

What prompted the son’s rejection? Why wasn’t he able to receive his father’s love for him? The answer is that Prodigal Son had a disease that ran in his family. Like his older brother, he felt that *he*was responsible for making himself lovable. The parable of the Prodigal Son shocks us into rejecting that age-old lie, which John corrected in the first century: **“It is not that we have loved God, brothers, but that he loved us.” (1 John 4:10)** Clearly, the father’s love was never a question of what his son deserved: The father threw a banquet for his son immediately after hearing that he had squandered half his property! The father ignores the remark about “not deserving” to be called a son and just goes back to showering love on his son, restoring the sonship he had always had by putting a robe on his shoulders, a ring on his finger, and sandals on his feet. The son had abused others and then abused himself by needlessly thinking he was unwanted. Now he comes home. The father races to meet his son and throws his arms around him, heedless entirely of what the young man has done. *You are here with me always, and I’m so glad you came back,*I imagine the father whispers as he kisses him. *I remembered you with such love, my son, and I always knew you would come home. (By John Knowles, Spiritualdirection.com)*

**The Company of Sinners**

Jesus kept company with sinners often enough for his detractors to point derogatory fingers. Why? Jesus himself gave the reason: “to seek and to save what was lost.” (Luke 19:10).

He meant it literally. First, he had to go looking for them, these beloved children of God who had somehow gone astray, like the prodigal son in today’s Gospel. Jesus found them everywhere: beside their fishing boats, in the synagogue, on sickbeds, and at the tables of Pharisees and tax collectors. But they did not everywhere welcome him. When the sinners made room for him at table and sat with him elbow-to-elbow, he was happy to join them, not to lecture them on their failings but surely to listen to them. The evangelists rarely speak of Jesus listening rather than speaking, but they show him over and over again to be a person who paid intense attention to the world around him.

By listening to tax collectors and prostitutes and all the less spectacular sinners he met and ate with, Jesus slowly changed them. They could walk a little taller because Jesus had taught them they were precious in his eyes and in the eyes of God. If that self-centered wastrel in the story could be welcomed home, maybe they could too.

And their stories can be ours, as Jesus often prods us to recognize. “Sinner” means me. Uncomfortable? Of course. When I look in the mirror, I prefer to picture the saint and blot out the sinner looking back at me. But if it’s sinners Jesus likes to be with? If we want to find him, that’s where we’d better look – at the sinners at home, in the next block, at work, on the news, in church. And in ourselves. Then maybe we’ll realize that, faithless as we’ve sometimes been, Jesus has been sitting there with us all along.

 - Sister Genevieve Glen, OSB

**From Henri Nouwen’s *The Return of the Prodigal Son***

Leaving home is much more than an historical event bound to time and place. It is a denial of the spiritual reality that I belong to God with every part of my being, that God holds me safe in an eternal embrace, that I am indeed carved in the palms of God’s hand and hidden in their shadows.

(Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son,* Doubleday, 1992)

**Love Pulls Us Back To God:** Love God and do as you will, says St. Augustine, for love is its own commandment. That is how St. Francis took it and lived it. He sinned, as all humans do, but after his conversion, he always knew when he had sinned because Love’s commandment drew him back to the divine love that underpinned everything he was and did.

It was not so much fear of punishment that motivated Francis but rather his commitment to him whom he loved, Jesus Christ. To separate oneself from Christ would be the sin for Francis. If he feared anything, it would have been that he would betray Christ, the love of his life.

 Fr. Murray Bodo, OFM - from the book [*Surrounded by Love: Seven Teachings from Saint Francis*](https://email.franciscanmedia.org/e3t/Ctc/48%2B113/c2Zy004/VW0B0H8BT_FTW3HKlH178qBwWW6G5rDL5s11yLN7FnD1-3qg1qW8wLKSR6lZ3n1W7-Yt3F3yzVQtW61FBrd6215dTW3Y2Kf4857TsGW34wqQ54_QkZCMjTNKF1hXKpW5brjNt90B4pKW2Jkr8R1Xh_v8W8Zt98F8w0mMMW4BpY6z2Ldy5BW2KT_9L19mldhW8-6_G91wRVsnW2Bmb-T8hx5BhW8HWnJ-145Gg5N98_yFMbll-bM8RLYfd418wVs-Tdw8w8h3JW6y3VTd7YmQKsW8lKCPS9cyX8RW7WCvCY1h0MFzW6-r6FD9knxgjW74DqgT1-NQJgW3Dhsbs5jPK7NN6zpWKtPgNqKW5V00Vk3-r2D1N7l8mMW9lwbvW5fk_Yd6QJXycW59bc3V2twTMKW4nS8427jkh0Lf911G3P04)

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God’s unconditional love can save us from our own mistakes and weaknesses. It also shows that when we are most broken – a complete disaster in the son’s case – that’s when God’s love can break through. “God longs to find an open door of vulnerability in us.” - Maria Boulding

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**An Ambassador’s Creed**

Years ago, I asked myself what it would look like if I listed the intellectual and moral attributes an ambassador for Christ should possess. I had in mind something like the Boy Scout Law I had memorized as a youngster (be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, etc.).

My musings led to a list of ten virtues. I then spent time clarifying precisely how I thought each virtue played its way out in day-to-day conduct. The full version of the Ambassador’s Creed is listed below.

The creed has been a great help to me. I find that if I’m not vigilant and intentional about my character, it’s easy to become shrill, thoughtless, unkind, uncharitable, self-centered...your basic LA freeway lout. Christ and His Kingdom deserve better than that, though, and reflecting on the Ambassador’s Creed helps me to live closer to my calling.

An ambassador for Christ is...

* Ready. An Ambassador is alert for chances to represent Christ, will not back away from a challenge or an opportunity, and will not be stumped by the same challenge twice.
* Patient. An Ambassador won’t quarrel, but will listen in order to understand, then will with gentleness seek to respectfully engage those who disagree.
* Reasonable. An Ambassador has informed convictions (not just feelings), gives reasons, asks questions, and aggressively seeks answers.
* Tactical. An Ambassador adapts to each unique person and situation, maneuvering with wisdom to challenge bad thinking, presenting the truth in an understandable and compelling way.
* Clear. An Ambassador is careful with language and will not rely on Christian lingo or gain unfair advantage by resorting to empty rhetoric.
* Fair. An Ambassador is sympathetic and understanding towards others and will acknowledge the merits of contrary views.
* Honest. An Ambassador is careful with the facts and will not misrepresent another’s view, overstate his own case, or understate the demands of the Gospel.
* Humble. An Ambassador is provisional in his claims, knowing that his understanding of truth is fallible. He will not press a point beyond what his justification allows.
* Attractive. An Ambassador will act with grace, kindness, and good manners. He will not dishonor Christ in his conduct.
* Dependent. An Ambassador knows that effectiveness requires collaborating with God’s power.

(Greg Koukl – published on Stand to Reason.org -2013)

Discussion Questions

Have you ever had an experience of being separated from someone, or from God, because of something you did? How did you feel during that time? How did it get resolved (or did it?)

In what ways has this Lenten season helped me to become a “new creation” (second reading) for the praise of God? Compare the idea of renewal and newness with the image of the barren desert.

How does the Father’s love help the prodigal son become a new creation?

Thinking about the parable, did you think the father was “foolish” for going to such extremes to welcome back his son? Can you see how radical the son’s rejection was (he was basically telling the father he wanted him dead so he could obtain his inheritance)?

What kind of a “desert” has the older brother put himself in? Describe the state of his feelings and resentment.

**Closing Prayer:**

*Take a few moments to give thanks silently for insights gained today, for a direction that may seem clearer, for desires awakened, or for the people in your group who have shared about their experiences of God today.*

*(Then close with:)*

**Loving Father,** you are patient with our wanderings,

understanding of our lapses in fidelity, and desirous of our return.

Lead us back, Beloved, to the home which is in your heart,

to the place of self-acceptance, tolerance and forgiveness.

Give us what we need to reach out to those who are alienated,

in confusion, pain, or misunderstanding.

Teach us how to be as welcoming of others

as we are welcomed always by you.

We pray this, trusting in your magnificent love for us.

In Jesus’ name and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

 *From: Prayer Time, Cycle C: Reflections on the Sunday Gospels* (Renew International)

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Weekly Focus Questions:

What was my “desert place” this week?

Was I able to see something new and green springing forth from this?