

Homily 4th Sunday of Lent Year C Prodigal Son 2022

We spend much of our lives looking for meaning and understanding that will help us develop into good people able to be of benefit and blessing to our families, our parishes, and our communities.

A great spiritual writer, Gerard W Hughes sj wrote, *“God of Surprises!”* Believe it! It’s true! Jesus’ story in the Gospel makes this very point in the father’s response to the return of his wayward son. However, with all our thorough planning and organising, it is very difficult to be surprised by God: our day has been planned down to the minutest detail.

Do you ever begin the day asking: *“Well what have you in store for me today! God!”* Not knowing what is going to happen or how to respond to a situation is fertile ground for the surprises that God offers us in abundance every day. Wanting to be in control, fearful of failure or an inability to respond, gives God very little wriggle room to bring a wonder, insight and understanding that will enrich and invigorate us with an inner **joy** (our Sunday theme – *Laetare*) only found in the Gospel.

A story from Anthony de Mello sj: **The Explorer:**

The explorer returned to his people eager to know about the Amazon. But how could he ever put into words the feelings that flooded his heart when he saw exotic flowers and heard the night-sounds of the forests; when he sensed the danger of wild beasts or paddled his canoe over treacherous rapids? He said, *“Go and find out for yourselves.”* To guide them he drew a map of the river. They pounced upon the map. They framed it in their Town Hall. They made copies of it for themselves. And all who had a copy considered themselves experts on the river; for, did they not know it’s every turn and bend, how broad it was, how deep, where the rapids were and where the falls were?

But no one took the journey. No one wanted to experience the journey themselves!

The good teacher doesn’t fill your head with knowledge and understanding but entices and lures you into wanting to make the journey of discovery yourself.

Have you ever thought that Jesus liked mixing with the tax collectors and sinners because he wanted to make his journey of discovery with people, like himself, wanting to live lives pleasing to God? The Scribes and Pharisees were boring and dull because they thought they had all the answers – knew the map by heart - and were already righteous in the eyes of God. Lent allows us to make this journey with others like ourselves seeking to live better lives.

Giving birth to us gave our mothers great **joy**. They then taught us the deep values, the wonders and mysteries of life in such a way that we could continue the journey on our own. There is no better way to thank them than to be Good News to all those we encounter but most of all to God the source of all JOY!

Henri J.M. Nouwen: *“The real mystery is that Jesus himself became the prodigal son for our sake. There is no journey to God outside the journey that Jesus made. Since his Son had become all in all, He has brought them all back. Rembrandt’s painting is the whole of humanity returning to God, the summary of the history of our salvation.”*