

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

YEAR C

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

Lord our God,
you are like a father,
waiting for your children
to return home.
Teach us to be sorry
for all we have done wrong,
turn back to you,
and be happy as you forgive us.
We pray to you through
Christ our Lord,
who lives with you
and the Holy Spirit,
forever and ever.

FIRST READING: *Joshua 5:9a, 10-12*
A reading from the prophet Joshua.

*When the people of Israel
crossed over the Jordan River,
they came into the promised land,
the place that God had told them about.*

God said to Joshua,
"Today I have saved you and your people
from the sufferings you had in Egypt."

And while they were staying
in a place called Gilgal,
they ate the Passover meal.
On the day after the Passover,
the people began to grow their own food
in the promised land.
They grew brown grain
and they ate unleavened bread.
From that time on
they didn't eat manna anymore,
because now they ate the food
that they grew on the land in Canaan.

The Word of the Lord.

RESPONSE: *Psalms 104*

RESPONSE:

You are the one who feeds us, giv-ing us food from your hand...
— You are the one who feeds us, giv-ing us all we need. —

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

"The lost has been found!" The Good News of God is for you! —

GOSPEL: *Luke 15:11-32*
A reading from the Gospel of Luke.

One day Jesus told this story.
There was a man who had two sons.
The younger son said to his father,
"Give me my half of all the family property—
all that would be mine after you die."
So the father divided everything he owned
between his two sons.
A few days later the younger son packed up all his things
and left home to live in a far away country.
But he wasted all of his money living a wild life.
After he had spent everything,

FOCUS OF THE READINGS:

Our Gospel focuses on God's loving response to our conversion. In this story, God is compared to a father who rejoices when his child returns home. The story tells us that we can never be truly happy when we turn away from God. When we realize that and want to go back, God is always there waiting to meet us with open arms.

God looks for those who are lost.

there was a bad famine in that country
and he became very hungry but could not buy any food.
He went to work for a farmer
who sent him out to feed the pigs.
The young man was so hungry
that he could have eaten the food the pigs ate,
but no one offered him even that.

At last, he came to his senses and said to himself,

"The people who work for my father
have more than enough food to eat,
and here I am starving to death.
I will go back to my father and I will say to him,
'Father, I have sinned against God and against you;
I am no longer good enough to be called your son.
Treat me like one of your workers.'"

So the young man started home.
But while he was still a long way off,
his father saw him coming and ran out to meet him.
He took his son in his arms and kissed him.

The young man said,
"Father, I have sinned against God and against you.
I am no longer good enough to be called your son."

But his father said to the servants,
"Quick! Bring out the best clothes and put them on him.
Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet.
Get our best calf and prepare a feast.
Let's eat and celebrate because my son was dead
and he has come back to life.
He was lost and has been found!"

[Now the older son was out in the field working.
But when he came close to the house, he heard music and dancing.
So he asked one of the servants what was going on.
The servant said,

"Your brother has come home
and your father has killed the best calf.
We are having a big party
because your brother is home safe and sound."

The older brother was very angry and would not go into the house.
His father went out and begged him to come in.
But the older son said to his father,

"I have worked for you all these years
and I have never once disobeyed you.
But you never gave me anything
so that I could have a party with my friends.
Now this son of yours comes back
after wasting all your money on wild living,
and you kill the best calf for him."

The father said to his older son,
"Son, you are always here with me.
Everything I have is yours too.
But we must be happy and celebrate now
because your brother was dead and now he is alive.
He was lost and now he has been found."]

The Gospel of the Lord.

[] Reader may omit text that appears in brackets.

REFLECTING ON THE READINGS WITH CHILDREN:

Ask the children if any of them has ever been lost or separated from their parents in a big store or elsewhere. What did that feel like? Give them time to talk about that. How did they feel when they saw their parents again?

Ask them to retell the story in the Gospel. Help them to visualize the story. They should know that the younger son was not a child. His father freely gave him what he asked for. His problem was that he didn't use it wisely. He tried to be totally independent.

We want to focus, not so much on what the boy did while he was away, but on his return. Why did he decide to go home? What was his father doing? It should be noted that "While he (the son) was still a long way off, his father saw him coming." *This implies that he was waiting and watching for his son.* What did he do when he saw his son? How do you think the father felt? How do you think the son felt? What did the father do then? Help the children see that Jesus is telling a story about God and us. We sometimes go our own way. *But when we turn back to God, God rejoices and welcomes us with open arms.*

If you read the second half, ask the children why they think the older brother felt as he did. Do we sometimes feel that way? What did the father say to his older son? Do you think the older son ever changed?