

Here's a text if you've only a minute ...

I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise always on my lips. *Psalm*

We are ambassadors for Christ. *Second Reading*

'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and against you.' *Gospel*

God our Father,
your Word, Jesus Christ, spoke peace to a sinful world
and brought us the gift of reconciliation
by the suffering and death he endured.
Teach us, the people who bear his name,
to follow the example he gave us:
may our faith, hope and charity
turn hatred to love, conflict to peace, death to eternal life.

Old Opening Prayer

This week's texts if you'd like to reflect further:
Joshua 5: 9–12; Psalm 33 (34); 2 Cor. 5: 17–21; Luke 15: 1–3, 11–32

Jean-Louis Forain, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*
(third plate), 1909, Wikimedia Commons



'This child of mine
was dead
and has come
back to life;
was lost
and is found!'

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ST BEUNO'S OUTREACH IN THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM



Fourth Sunday in Lent
Year C, 27th March 2022

'Rejoice! This child of mine
was lost, and is found!'

On this *Laetare* ('Rejoice!') Sunday midway through Lent, we are encouraged to celebrate with hope and joy before we enter the darker times of Holy Week. Today we particularly rejoice in the reconciliation and forgiveness of sins bought for us by Jesus's suffering and death.

In the **First Reading**, the Israelites celebrate their first Passover in the Promised Land. No longer reliant on the manna with which God had sustained them during their years in the desert, they rejoice that God has brought them to a place where the bounty of the earth feeds them.

The **Psalm** is one of praise, rejoicing in God's goodness. It glorifies the Lord, who hears and answers our prayers when we are afraid or in distress. St Paul speaks of the 'new creation' made possible by Christ's suffering and death. Through this sacrifice, God has reconciled humanity to God's self, and our faults are forgiven. Because of this, we ourselves are then called to share the good news of forgiveness with others. (**Second Reading**)

The **Gospel** relates the first part of the story of the return of the prodigal son. We witness the total and utter forgiveness the father bestows on his selfish and wayward son, who now regrets his foolishness. Just as the father forgives his son, so we know that we too will be forgiven, as we express our sorrow for actions and inactions that take us away from God. As we celebrate the joy of knowing that we are totally loved and forgiven, in these final weeks of Lent we ask for the grace to see ourselves as God sees us, and to see others just as God sees them too.

Opening Prayer

O God, who through your Word
reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way,
grant, we pray, that with prompt devotion and eager faith
the Christian people may hasten
toward the solemn celebrations to come.

Second Reading 2 Corinthians 5: 17–21

For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here. It is all God's work. It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation. In other words, God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself, not holding people's faults against them, and he has entrusted to us the news that they are reconciled. So we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were appealing through us, and the appeal that we make in Christ's name is: be reconciled to God. For our sake God made the sinless one into sin, so that in him we might become the goodness of God.

I take all the time I need to settle in whatever way works best for me, as I respond to God's invitation to spend some time in prayer.

I ask for the grace to hear what God might be saying to me.

I read the text slowly, noticing where I am drawn to linger.

I may want to read these words or phrases a number of times – asking the Lord to help me understand their meaning if I am puzzled.

I might like to read the words again out loud, but this time personalising them for myself. I hear myself say, *'He has entrusted to me the news that I am reconciled'*. I notice how I feel about this.

Do I feel joy, elation, excitement – or something else?

Perhaps deep down I'm not quite so sure that it can really be true?

'It was God who gave me the work of handing on this reconciliation.'

Does knowing the joy of reconciliation inspire me to want to share with others, or do I feel uneasy about the thought of speaking out?

I talk to the Lord about the graces I might need to help me answer his call.

'So I am an ambassador for Christ'.

I take some time to ponder what this might mean for me.

Mindful of the sacrifice which enabled this gift of reconciliation,

I might place myself humbly before Jesus on the cross.

Adapting the words of St Ignatius, I can ask,

'How in the past have I been an ambassador for Christ?

How am I an ambassador for Christ now?

How, with God's help, might I be an ambassador for Christ in the future?'

I ponder whatever God brings to my attention.

When I am ready, I close with an *Our Father*.

Gospel Luke 15: 11–24 (abridged)

Jesus said, 'A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me". So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants.'"

So he left the place and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate.'

As I settle to pray, I ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to hear and understand anew God's message for me.

Perhaps I hear Jesus himself telling *me* this story, and I identify with the younger son. In my imagination, I notice how it feels to swallow my pride and face up to the foolish way I have behaved. Do I dare believe that my father could welcome me back after everything I've done?

How do I express my sorrow and ask for his forgiveness?

Maybe then I am able to put myself in the father's place. Overwhelmed with joy, knowing that my prayers have been answered, how do I find the words to tell this beloved one of mine how much I love him? How does it feel as I show him that whatever has been done is done, and is left behind?

Leaving the two of them together, I turn to look again at Jesus, my friend, and I share with him what I need and desire from the depths of my heart.