



Lenten Message 2011

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Our Lord's parable of the prodigal son is one of my favorite Scriptures (Luke 15: 11-32).

We all know the story.

A son leaves his father's house to go off to a far country. There he squanders his inheritance on bad living. He hits bottom, realizes he was wrong, and is sorry. He returns to his father to seek forgiveness. When his father sees him coming, he runs out to greet him with kisses and embraces. He orders a new robe for his son and a big feast.

I love this story for its drama and emotion, and because it rings true.

Each of us in our own way is that prodigal son. Sometimes we take our Father's gifts for granted. Sometimes we try to run away from God, or to live as if he doesn't exist.

This is the reality of sin. And we are all sinners.

That's what makes this parable so beautiful. Our Lord is telling us that sin does not have to be the last word in our lives.

Jesus — by becoming like us in all things except sin, by dying for us while we were yet sinners — revealed the power of God's love and mercy.

And our Father still comes to embrace his prodigal sons and daughters in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation — no matter how big our sins are or how many times we repeat them.

As often as we come to confession with a contrite heart, we will find our Father ready to forgive us, arms open wide to welcome us home to the Church and the Eucharist.

This is what Lent is all about — reconciliation with God and his Church, and deeper conversion to Christ and his Gospel.

Lent is the season of renewal, the springtime of the spirit. It is a time for purification, for rooting out bad habits and making good resolutions.

These 40 days remind us that our Christian life is a call to ongoing conversion. I encourage you to make a good confession before Easter, even if it has been a long time.

Come home to our Father! Be reconciled to God through the ministry of his Church! Don't wait to change your life! You can hope in our Father's mercy. You can trust in his pledge of grace to help you lead a better life.

In the early Church, they called confession the "second conversion in tears." St. Peter wept in sorrow after denying Jesus, and in his mercy Christ spoke to him the tender words of his pardon and peace.

In the sacrament, we too can hear these words of compassion for our sins.

St. Ambrose, writing to his sister in the year 388, said that in the Church, "there are water and tears: the water of Baptism and the tears of repentance" (Catechism, n. 1429).

Our tears of repentance, and all our efforts to deepen our conversion to Christ, lead us back to the waters of our Baptism.

That is why Lent leads to the baptisms we celebrate at the Easter Vigil.

In Lent we are purifying ourselves so that we can live out the identity we were given in Baptism — no longer prodigal sons, but children of God.

The Church Fathers read the prodigal son parable as the story of the human condition. Created as a child of God, the first man Adam rejected his birthright through original sin. But God in his forgiveness restored Adam's descendants — all humanity — to divine sonship in Christ.

It is God who rejoices in the parable: "My son was dead and is alive again." When he gives his son a new robe, it signifies the white garment we are clothed with in Baptism. When he orders a feast of thanksgiving, it signifies the Eucharist.

My sisters and brothers, the pilgrimage of the prodigal son is the story of our lives!

This Lent, let us seek to deepen our awareness of our baptismal identity.

Our Father has raised us from the dead in Baptism and poured the Spirit of love and adoption into our hearts. We are his beloved children now, fellow heirs to Christ and his promise of the resurrection. We are brothers and sisters in his family, the Church.

Through our sacrifices and prayers this Lent, may we grow in gratitude for this great privilege. Let us live truly as God's children!

I will pray for you this week. Please pray for me.

And let us ask Our Lady of Guadalupe for the grace of deeper conversion, that we might always return to our Father's house, our hearts open to his mercy.