

Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year C, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for the session, read all the readings.

Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

Psalm 34: 2-3, 4-5, 6-7

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading which appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word In Liturgy

Last week's readings drew our attention to the God of mercy and forgiveness who patiently calls us to conversion. Today's scripture texts focus our attention on our human response: the experience of conversion, which constitutes our acceptance of God's offer of forgiveness. Next week, in the story of the woman caught in adultery, we will see an image of how God's forgiveness opens up for us a new life. This Sunday was called "Laetare Sunday" in the old Latin liturgy, from the opening words of the Entrance Antiphon. That text is still preserved in today's Mass formulary, and the rubrics still allow the wearing of rose vestments today as a sign that a pause in the rigors of penance may be appropriate at this stage of the Lenten journey. A mood of festive celebration, in fact, still resonates in the Scripture texts of the day.

The Book of Joshua describes the conquest of Canaan at the hands of Joshua, Moses' successor as leader of the tribes of Israel. The "disgrace" that has been removed from the people is most probably a reference to their slavery in Egypt, now ended as they establish themselves in the Promised Land. The setting for this scene is a period of rest before the siege of Jericho. The Passover meal that is described marks an end to the people's need for manna, the miraculous food God provided during their desert wanderings.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is an extremely dense tale, rich with many layers of meaning. It offers at one time a phenomenology of the process of conversion, a powerful and even shocking image of the unconditional nature of God's forgiving love even before we repent,



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and a sharp rebuke of the self-righteous attitudes typified in the older brother. Each of the three figures in the story carries an important message for us today, just as they did for Jesus' contemporaries and for the community of Luke. Read against the backdrop of today's first reading, the parable becomes a story of how the "disgrace" of the son's slavery is rolled back. Like the ancient Israelites celebrating the Passover meal in the Promised Land, the son is offered a festive meal with which to celebrate his reconciliation. The early Christian community of Luke would surely have understood that authentic conversion leads to the eucharistic table.

Catholic Doctrine

Conversion

As the Church prepares to enter into the Lenten season, the faithful are marked with the sign of the cross, the sign of redemption, with ashes and are admonished, "Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel!" Even though the baptized have been freed from sin through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus and in Lent recall their salvation, everyone who has been initiated still experiences the weakness of the human condition and concupiscence, the inclination to sin.

The newness of life received by those who are baptized can help overcome this inclination toward sin. This is the "turning away from sin" referred to in the Ash Wednesday ritual of signing with ashes. Such a turning may require a lifelong struggle, and the changes entailed are described as conversion.

Jesus begins his public ministry with the call to repent and believe in the good news. Jesus preaches conversion. The imperative to change one's life in accord with the life of God is not simply meant for those who are hearing the Gospel for the first time in preparation for baptism. Catholic theology has always recognized conversion as an ongoing reality after one's Baptism.

The inner conversion called for by Jesus and for which all constantly strive is expressed eventually in outward signs and gestures. The radical reorienting of one's life issues forth in good works.