

## HOMILY ~ FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT MARCH 26/27, 2022

There was a little boy who was being picked up in the morning by a neighbor who was going to drive him to kindergarten. When the boy came out the front door, the neighbor noticed that there was an older woman at the door waving goodbye to him. When the boy got into the car, the neighbor asked: "Is that your grandmother?" The boy responded: "Yes." The neighbor asked: "Is she staying with you for a few days?" The boy responded "Yes." Then the neighbor asked: "Where does your grandmother live?" The boy responded: "She lives at the airport. We go pick her up when we want to see her." Young children are the center of their own world, and they do not think too much about what is going on with other people. Hopefully, we get better at that as we get older.

The "Parable of the Prodigal Son" is very appropriate during Lent because we are called to become better people come Easter than we were when Lent began. We are presented with three paths to becoming better people in the parable today. The parable could just as well be called the "Parable of the Older Brother" or the "Parable of the Forgiving Father." You will probably identify with at least one of them depending upon where you are in your life, maybe all three.

Let's talk first about the younger son. He disrespects his father by asking for his inheritance before his father's death. This would have been totally inappropriate in the culture at the time. He was as much as saying he wanted his father dead. His family and friends of the family would be angry with him for the way he treated his father, but his father agreed. He goes to a distant place where sin is made to look like fun. And it may have been for a while until people started getting hurt. We have all decided, at one time or another, to do something that is not good for us thinking it may be fun. We have all gone to those distant places. Drugs and alcohol seem like fun until we get addicted. When the drugs or alcohol take over, that is when people start getting hurt. Unhealthy eating and no exercise may seem like the way to go until we develop health problems. Cheating on someone who loves us may seem exciting until we realize we may have lost one of the best things that has ever happened to us. Name your sin. The moment we admit that we have sinned is the moment we begin to take responsibility for our sin. We like to blame others, but the path to becoming a better person starts with taking responsibility. Admitting that he had sinned is just the first step for the younger son. At the time the younger

son decides to go home, it is a choice between dying in a distant land or going home to his father. There is no repentance yet. Repentance involves seeing how he has hurt others and making up for his hurtful actions. Do you need to take responsibility for your sins? Do you need to make up for your actions and repair the damage that has been done? Do you need to say those difficult words: *I am sorry, I was wrong, please forgive me, and I will never do it again?* Does the younger son change his ways? We do not know.

The older son is also lost, but he does not know it. He has spent his whole life trying to earn his father's love, and he already has it. He has served his father, not out of love and respect for his father, but because he expected to be rewarded. The older son has harshly judged his brother and disrespected his father's wishes. The path to being a better person for the older brother is to stop judging his brother and to start helping him. The younger brother has a lot of work to do, and he needs the love and support of his brother to do that. Does the older brother go in and join the celebration; or does he punish himself, stay outside and lose his relationship with his brother and his father? We do not know.

The father sees his younger son while he is still far off, which indicates he has been waiting for him. He runs to meet his son, embraces and kisses him before his son has the opportunity to apologize. He treats him like a king with the finest robe, ring on his finger and sandals on his feet and calls for a big celebration. The father has unconditional love for both his sons. The father got what he wanted, but the father's road to being a better person is to be a bridge builder between his sons and all of the many people his son has hurt. He did that by calling for the big celebration. We have so many people creating polarities in our country today. We need bridge builders. I have had a number of parents and grandparents who have told me recently, my child or my grandchild just told me that they are gay or transgender. I do not know what to do. I think your first job as a parent or grandparent is to love your children. Maybe you can be a bridge builder for them. Was the father in the parable able to build some bridges? We do not know.

What do you need to do to be a better person come Easter? Do you need to take responsibility for your sin, change your life and repair the damage you caused? Do you need to stop judging someone and love, support and help them instead? Do you need to build some bridges? What do you think?

Love & Peace,  
Fr. Jim