

Father Terry writes:

Did you ever own a kaleidoscope as a child? If you did then you will know the wonder and pleasure that this simple toy can bring. You look through the lens and you find a bright multi-coloured pattern in which the elements have arranged themselves. You turn the kaleidoscope slightly, look again, and behold, there is a whole new pattern to marvel at. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15.11-32) has the same effect, if we look at it again with fresh eyes. Take the very title. We know it as the parable of the prodigal son, that is to say, the story of the spendthrift, reckless son. But there are really two parables in the story. There is the parable of the lost younger son (verses 11-23) and there is parable of the lost older son (verses 24-32). The younger is lost in his selfishness, the elder is lost in his bitterness and resentment.

Another shift of the kaleidoscope and we focus on the father: we could re-name it the parable of the waiting father, because it is the endlessly loving father who is the real focus of the story. This is the picture of God that Jesus wants to convey. He wants us to understand that God never stops loving. He sees the wastrel younger son coming 'while he was a long way off' – which tells us that the father was looking towards the horizon, longing for the son's return. What a humbling depiction of God, humbling, that is, of us, as we realise something of the depths of God's love for us.

It gets even more humbling. Take the father's instructions that the servants should put the best robe on the prodigal son, plus a ring and sandals (v 22). The best robe indicates the guest of honour at the feast. The ring is a sign of dignity, and perhaps even of authority if we are to understand it as like a signet ring. Even the sandals are significant, because they indicate a free man – slaves and servants would go around the house bare-footed. We are to understand that not only does God generously forgive, but he also lifts up us miserable sinners and gives us a new status as his beloved sons and daughters.

With this in mind, let's look at the other two readings. Our first reading from Joshua comes as the Hebrew people have crossed over the Jordan, and have entered the promised land. We read (5.9) that God 'has taken away the shame of Egypt'. This probably refers to the slavery of the people in Egypt. God's will is that his people should be free. In the same way, once the prodigal son had begun to turn back to his father, he was met with a loving embrace. There was no second imprisonment in guilt or recrimination. God lifts up his people. What kind of slavery do we find today, from which we need to be set free? If we are the prodigal son, we are enslaved to our recklessness, selfishness and pursuit of pleasure. If we are the elder son, we are imprisoned by anger and resentment. The same is true of more literal enslavement, where people are trapped in poverty and hardship. This is not God's plan. God challenges those who can do so to bring freedom and new life to others. We are to help one another to be free of whatever holds us back from the fullness of life. As we read today in 2 Corinthians 5.20: 'We are ambassadors for Christ.'

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Fourth Sunday of Lent (year C)

14th March 2010

Today's Readings p.123-127 St. Paul's Missal



SERVICE TIMES

**Saturday Vigil Mass 6 pm; Sunday at 8.30 am, 10 am, 11.30 and 6 pm
1 pm (Syriac Rite, in Arabic and Aramaic)**

Weekdays: Mass daily 9.30 am & 6 pm Benediction: Sat. 7-7.30 pm

Confession: Saturday 10-10.30 am and 5.15-5.45 pm

OFFICE HOURS

Monday-Friday 10am-1pm and 2pm-4pm