

# “HE LEFT THE PLACE AND WENT BACK TO THE FATHER”

(Lk 15:20)

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## A Penitential Service for Holy Week 2020

(For use on Spy Wednesday at home or in online services)



### Opening Hymn: The Lord's My Shepherd

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;  
He makes me down to lie  
In pastures green; He leadeth me  
The quiet waters by.

My soul He doth restore again,  
And me to walk doth make  
Within the paths of righteousness,  
E'en for His own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,  
Yet will I fear no ill;  
For Thou art with me, and Thy rod  
And staff me comfort still.

Goodness and mercy all my life  
Shall surely follow me,  
And in God's house forevermore  
My dwelling-place shall be.

### Introduction

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you.

And with your Spirit.

**Priest:** This is a time when the Church traditionally invites us to come back to God with our whole heart, so that we might live more richly the gift of life that he has given us. Just now, however, many of have become particularly aware of our smallness and vulnerability. We have come to recognise, perhaps, that we don't have all the answers. Let us turn in prayer to our Father who is rich in mercy.

## Prayer

*Priest:* Lord Jesus, you redeemed us by your Passion  
and raised us to the new life of Baptism  
Protect us with your unchanging love  
And share with us the joy of your Resurrection,  
You who live and reign for ever and ever

## First Reading

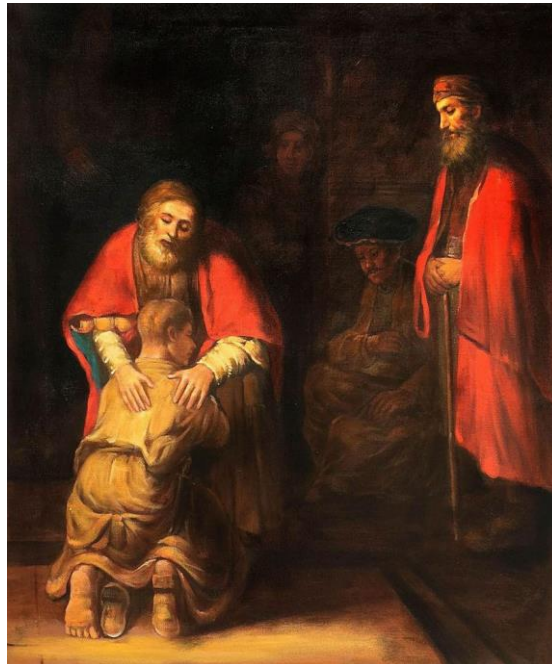
### *A Reading from the First Letter of St John*

Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us, by letting us be called God's children; and that is what we are.

Because the world refused to acknowledge Him, therefore it does not acknowledge us. My dear people, we are already the children of God but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed; all we know is, that when it is revealed we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as he really is. Whoever treasures this hope in him purifies himself, to be as pure as He is.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.



## Psalm

Have mercy on me, O God, in your kindness.  
In your compassion blot out my offence.  
O wash me more and more from my guilt  
and cleanse me from my sin.

*Response:* Give me again the Joy of your Help.

My offences truly I know them;  
my sin is always before me.  
Against you, you alone, have I sinned;  
what is evil in your sight I have done. R.

A pure heart create for me, O God,  
put a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from your presence,  
nor deprive me of your holy spirit. R.

Give me again the joy of your help;  
with a spirit of fervour sustain me,  
that I may teach transgressors your ways  
and sinners may return to you. R.

### Alternatively sing or play:

Be Merciful O God (Michael Joncas)

OR

Come Back to Me (John M. Talbot)



## Gospel

The Lord be With You.

And with Your Spirit

### *A Reading from the Holy Gospel According to St. Luke*

Then 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.

‘Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. “Your brother has come” replied the servant “and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound.” He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, “Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property – he and his women – you kill the calf we had been fattening.”

‘The father said, “My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found.”’

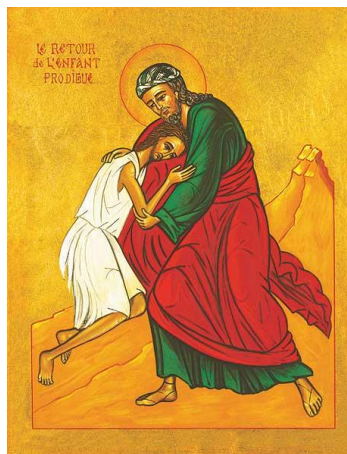
The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

## Homily / Reflection

*This is not a homily; it is just some points that might help an online celebrant to prepare a homily. Alternatively, it may be of help to parishioners who use the Liturgy in the family home. We draw here on the homily of Pope Francis given on 20<sup>th</sup> March.*

- Lent is a time for making sacrifices and for turning back to the Lord with our whole hearts.
- As the parable of the Prodigal tells us, turning back to the Lord also involves seeing one another in a different way and treating one another differently.
- This year, we didn't get to choose our sacrifices; they were chosen for us and, let's face it, they are probably tougher than anything we would have chosen for ourselves.
- It's no harm to remember that Jesus didn't choose his cross; it was given to him.
- This year, we have been asked to walk through Lent.
- When the Prodigal Son set out on the journey home, he had nothing left except the image of a Father who loved him, but that was what brought him home.
- Pope Francis has spoken about this in recent days; he said *"I know that many of you go to Confession for Easter to renew your relationship with God. But some of you ask me: 'Father, how can I go to Confession when I can't leave the house?' You may be asking the same question.*
- The Pope's answer is: *"If you cannot find a priest to confess to, speak directly with God, your Father, and tell him the truth. Say, 'Lord, I did this, this, this. Forgive me,' and ask for pardon with all your heart. Make an act of contrition and promise God, 'I will go to confession afterward, but forgive me now.' And immediately you will return to a state of grace with God."*
- Confession is good for the soul and it is the normal way for us to seek the forgiveness of God.
- Absolution from a priest is important, in the normal course of events, because there is a natural desire not only to be forgiven, but to be reassured personally that we are forgiven.
- For now, however, when Confession is not possible because of the risk of infection, the Pope's advice is good. Trust your Father. Let nothing get in the way of coming home. That, in a nutshell, is the story of the Prodigal Son.



## **Examination of Conscience**

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he told them to go into their private room and pray to their Father in secret. We now invite you to enter into that private space and to speak to your Father about what is in your heart or “on your conscience”; about what you have done or failed to do. To help you with this we might reflect on what it might mean in your life:

- a) To go away from the Father’s House;
- b) To be living in a distant country;
- c) To return to the Father.

### ***a) Going away from the Father’s House***

The going away of the Prodigal Son was not just a physical going away. Even before he walked out the door, the Prodigal had gone away in his heart. Asking for his share of the inheritance while his Father was still alive; that says it all. The older son was only out in the fields but, in his heart, he was just as far away from his Father as his young brother was

- Where is your heart? Does it belong to God?
- At Baptism you became a Son or Daughter of God. What does that mean in your life today?
- Do you give time and attention to prayer?
- Do you participate regularly in the Sunday Eucharist, where Jesus invites us to be nourished with God’s Word and with his Body and Blood?
- Do you think more of what God owes you than of what you owe God; do you have a spirit of gratitude, or a spirit of entitlement?

Going away from the Father’s house also means severing the bond of family with my brothers and sisters.

- How are your relationships with my own immediate family; with my neighbours; with your colleagues at work?
- Do you see them as people who, like you, are deeply loved by the Father?
- Do you treat them with respect?
- Do you acknowledge their gifts?
- Or do you carry jealousy or resentment in your heart towards them?

### **b) Living in a distant country**

Living in a distant country is a good image for being in a state of sin. I am far from the Father and, in the beginning, it doesn’t bother me. I have “got out from under”, but gradually the quality of my life changes and I realise that I have lost touch with whatever and whoever it was that gave me life

- The Prodigal Son lived a life of debauchery; have I indulged myself excessively in food, in drink, in television?
- What kind of relationships have I formed: are they faithful and life-giving, or are they less wholesome, or even abusive?
- Have I been wasteful of my inheritance; the many gifts that I have been given?
- Have I spent my time and my money on myself, without considering the needs of others; of the poor?
- Have I been responsible in my care of the earth, which is our common home?
- The Prodigal hired himself out; this was not about being an employee, but about losing control over his own life and his own human dignity. Am I able to take responsibility? Am I ready to account for myself, or do I just follow the herd?

In these days, so much has changed. So much that was certain and permanent has become uncertain and provisional. Maybe this contributes in some way to my own sense of uncertainty and prompts me to think of where my only certainty lies.

### **c) Returning to the Father's House**

In that distant country, the Prodigal Son recognised for the first time how foolish he was and how much he had lost. Somewhere in the middle of that he began to see his Father in a new way. Somewhere, in the depth of his heart, he remembered a Daddy who loved him; who would take him back, if only he could take that first step. What would it mean to me, in practice, to return to my Father's house?

- Have I the courage to start out on that journey?
- Can I see my heavenly Father already standing at the door, waiting for me?
- Have I the humility to say "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you"?
- The Father embraced his Son: will I allow myself to be embraced by my Heavenly Father?
- What would it mean for me to take on, joyfully and generously, the responsibilities of a Son; as a member of God's family the Church?
- Is there something that I can do to restore a damaged or absent relationship with a brother or sister; a son or daughter; a neighbour or a colleague?
- I was created in the image of God; how can I begin to be more like my Father?
- Maybe I am a son or a daughter; how is the quality of my relationship with my Father or my Mother?
- Maybe I am a Father, or a Mother; how could I better reflect the parenthood of God in my own relationships with my children?

## **Act of Repentance**

Our God is a God of Mercy, slow to anger and full of patience. He is the Father who welcomes us when we return from that distant country. Let us pray to him with trust in his goodness:

**R.** We are not worthy to be called your children.

By our misuse of your gifts we have sinned against you.

**R.** We are not worthy to be called your children.

By straying from you in mind and heart, we have sinned against you.

**R.** We are not worthy to be called your children.

By forgetting your love, we have sinned against you.

**R.** We are not worthy to be called your children.

By indulging ourselves, while neglecting our true good and the good of our neighbour, we have sinned against you.

**R.** We are not worthy to be called your children.

By being slow to forgive, we have sinned against you.

**R.** We are not worthy to be called your children.

By failing to forgive, we have sinned against you.

**R.** We are not worthy to be called your children.

By failing to remember your repeated forgiveness towards us, we have sinned against you.

Let us turn to our Father now, with complete confidence in his love for us, which was never in doubt. Let us pray to Him as Jesus taught us.

Our Father ...

## **Peace**

Though we are separated from one another in the very unusual circumstances of these weeks, we remain one family, through the love of our Father for all his children. Let us pause for a moment in silence to extend the gift of peace to one another.



## **Final Prayer**

God Our Father, you chose us to be your sons and daughters,  
To be holy in your sight,  
To be happy in your presence.  
You did not choose us because we are worthy,  
but because you wanted us.  
Receive us now as a loving Father  
So that we may share the joy and love of your Holy Church  
We ask this through Christ Our Lord.

(The celebrant might conclude by looking forward to the time when it will be possible to welcome people again to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and to assure people that, in the meantime, if they have participated with sincerity and with the intention of going the Confession when it is possible, they “are in a state of grace with God”)

## **Blessing**

The Lord be with You.	And with your Spirit.
May almighty God Bless you; may He keep you from all evil and bring you to everlasting life.	Amen.
Let us Bless the Lord.	Thanks be to God.

## **Concluding Hymn: Now Thank We All Our God**

Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things has done, in Whom this world rejoices;  
Who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way  
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,  
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;  
And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed;  
And free us from all ills, in this world and the next!

All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given;  
The Son and Him Who reigns with Them in highest Heaven;  
The one eternal God, Whom earth and Heaven adore;  
For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.