

4th Sunday of Lent, Cycle C: Mar. 14, 2010

Did you ever notice how difficult it is to recall something that has just been read to you? It happens to me sometimes. You know how it goes. Five (5) minutes after the Gospel is read you can't tell anyone what it was about, much less the first or second Readings for that matter. It seems that our attention spans have been shortened in this information age.

But today is not one of those days, right? And the reason is that the story from Luke's Gospel is so familiar. It seems that we have heard it a hundred times, and the danger is that we will tune it out. However, the reality is that God's Word, as revealed in Scripture, is a living Word and can speak to us in so many ways, regardless of the number of times that we have heard it. So it is important for us to revisit this story to see what new insights God is trying to communicate with us.

You know how it starts. A man has two (2) sons, one (1) of whom wants his portion of his father's inheritance and he wants it right now. He doesn't want to wait for his father's death and after he receives it, he heads off to a distant land. Now it doesn't stretch us too far to see this as a story about walking away from God's love and turning our backs on where and with whom we belong. We hear in today's story of the son squandering the inheritance on a sinful life style and the illusion of self-sufficiency. His is a sin of pride. I'm old enough to be on my own, right? Wrong!

Once again, we know the story. He realizes his hopelessness and decides to return to his father's house. And on the way, he begins to practice his lines, much the way we would do, if we were in his place. He wants to get the words just right so that he can push all of his father's emotional buttons. But, what happens? In the middle of his *spiel*, the father cuts him off. He doesn't want to hear the excuses and punishing the son is the farthest thing from the father's mind. The father seems to be saying that the son is loved and belongs to the father and regardless of his behavior he belongs in his father's house. What a generous and loving gesture.

Once again, we don't have to look too far to recognize God's image in Luke's Gospel story. We recognize the face of a God who doesn't care how far we have gone or how long we have been gone, a God who doesn't need or want to hear our explanations. He only wants us to turn around and catch sight of him and realize what a wonderful, generous and compassionate God we have.

My brothers and sisters, during the remainder of Lent, let's stop our wandering and turn with grateful and joyful hearts to our God, a God who loves us more than we are capable of imagining. Let us return to the feast that he has prepared in our honor. Let us relish the Eucharist banquet in which we will all share today. Let us feel a sense of gratitude as we gather around our father's table and in his house where we are all received as quests of honor.