**Homily for the 4th Sunday of Lent(3/31/2019)**

Rev. Francis Kim

This is a great parable for Lent. The prodigal son story highlights the essential elements of what true mercy and reconciliation are all about. In this parable, Jesus gives a vivid picture of God and what God is like.

God is truly merciful. Pope Francis says God’s name is mercy. God is our loving Father, and merciful and forgiving Father. So, He rejoices in finding the lost and in welcoming them home.

There are three persons in this parable: the prodigal son, the older brother, and the merciful father. Each of these persons speaks to us in different, but equally powerful ways to reconciliation.

First, there is the younger son, the prodigal son, who demands his inheritance, goes off to a distant country, and loses everything. This unknown ‘distant country’ is more than a place.

It is really a way of living or a condition of the heart. We often go away to the ‘distant country,’ when we leave behind the Church, Gospel, or community to follow our own way.

When the prodigal son comes to his senses, we hear his confession: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.” That moment is the key to a different future for him and the key to the way of reconciliation.

It is a grace to be able to say, “I have sinned.” It is a sign of moral awakening and spiritual maturity to be able to say, “I have sinned.”

Lent is a time to repent and say, “I am sorry for I have sinned against you.”

And, second, there is the older brother. Maybe, we sometimes feel that people who repent shouldn’t just be able to come back so easily. We think that they should suffer somehow. They should agonize, be humiliated, know pain, and pay for what they have done.

But, they don’t have to. None of us have to. Because Jesus Christ, our Savior, suffered and died for us, we come back home anytime without paying. Jesus paid everything for us already.

The prodigal son came back, but now, he has a lot of work to do to restore trust with the family, to make up for lost time, to repair relationships with others, and to rebuild what he damaged by his departure. He will need the support and help of the family, including the older brother.

When people repent from their sins and reconcile to God and community, and so begin to walk once more with the Church, then, they need our help. That is one lesson of the older brother to us.

Repentant sinners don’t need our resentment, but our help along the way back. That is the way to Easter joy of the older brother, helping those who are coming back.

Finally, there is the merciful and forgiving father. He welcomes back his prodigal son instantly not caring about what or how he lost everything.

He does not even wait for the son to get back into the house. Now, the father brings reconciliation to the family.

St. Paul in the second reading calls this a ministry of reconciliation, of ‘bridge building.’ The work of bridge building between divided people is the majestic vocation of being a peacemaker. The way of the father for all of us is to be bridge builders in the community.

This is a great parable for Lent that speaks to every one of us. Through the prodigal son, it speaks about the importance of coming to say, “I am sorry for I have sinned.”

Through the older brother, it speaks of the need of those who repent for our help, not our resentment. Through the forgiving and merciful father, it speaks to us about the reconciliation, a bridge building.

Which of these three, the prodigal son, the older brother, or forgiving father, speaks to you this Lent? Each one of them opens a door and shows a way to Easter joy.

The season of Lent reminds us that God is waiting with open arms for us to come back to Him. The mercy of God is truly a great gift!

So, be merciful just as our heavenly Father is merciful!