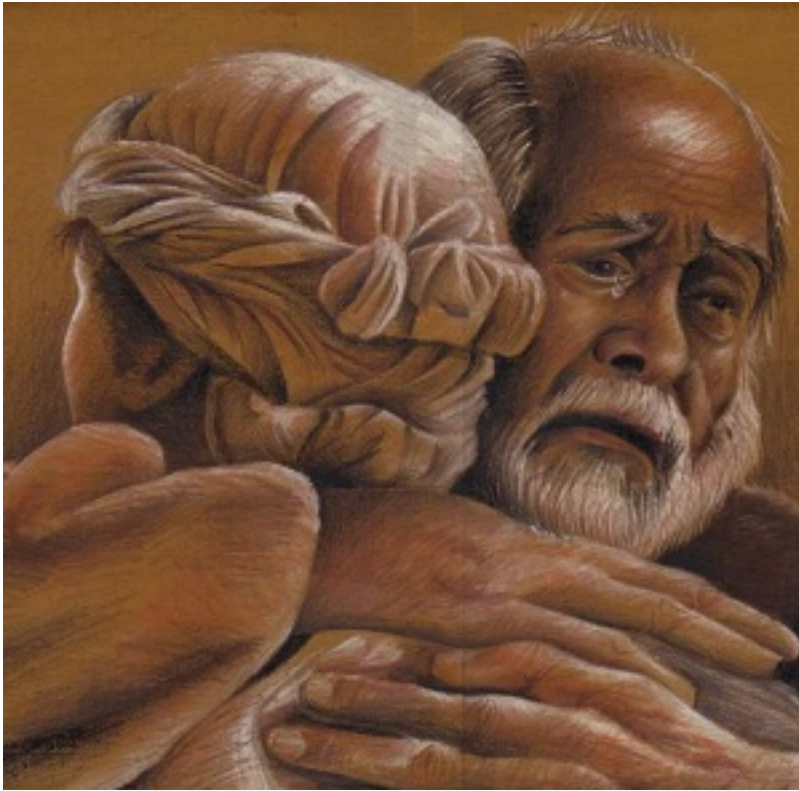


Commentary to the 4th Sunday of Lent (C)

Seeking, Forgiving, Celebrating



When we can muster up the courage to say to God, "Father, I'm sorry," and realize that God responds, "You are forgiven," we become happy with ourselves and with our world. Yes, we still recognize sin in the world, but this negativity takes a back seat to our sense of the overwhelming goodness of God's creation. I once heard a young lady say that after a really good confession at college she ran around the campus and had a profound realization of the beauty of the world. The joy of having guilt removed is the focus of this Sunday with its rose vestments, Laetare Sunday.

The Forgiving Father runs out to meet his son. He doesn't wait for the Prodigal to finish his little speech. The Father is overwhelmed with joy. The son also felt the joy of being forgiven and restored to a loving relationship with the Father.

The elder son seems to have cause to be upset. He did the right thing throughout his life. He worked his portion of the inheritance, his two thirds of the property, for his father. He suffered through his brother's insulting of the father. There is nothing that gets us angrier than when someone we love is offended. But he let this anger control him.

A banquet is thrown, but the elder son refused to enter. The Father who was offended had forgiven the Prodigal. The elder son refused to forgive. In scripture a banquet is a way of expressing the intimate sharing of God's life. The Elder Son separated himself from the intimacy of his Father's love because he refused to forgive his brother. We separate ourselves from the intimacy of God's love when we refuse to forgive others who have sinned.

We all have battle stories. We have all had people who have consciously and callously hurt us. I've been offended and so have you. But if we don't forgive those who have hurt us, we will be keeping

ourselves out of the banquet of God's intimacy. "Father, you don't know what he or she did, said. I am taking my anger to the grave." Well, that will fix them. Look, if we want to receive God's forgiveness, we have to give God's forgiveness. If we don't forgive we will end up standing outside the banquet griping and grouching, but separating ourselves from God's love. At the conclusion of the parable, only the Elder Son is absent from the banquet. And he did this to himself.

"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." That's right. He welcomes us and eats with us. He shows us a better way to live, a way to live free from sin. The Parable of the Prodigal Son, Forgiving Father and Elder Brother is a brilliant depiction of our human condition, our foibles, and the unlimited compassion that God offers us if we are willing to turn from sin and hatred.

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