

Pastoral Reflection: 4th Sunday Of Lent

Luke 15,1-3,11-32 / Parable of Second Chance

We all get second chances in life. Chances to start over. Chances to right a wrong. Chances to make a difference. Of course, many times second chances are not fair or just. But, when we received our personal second chances, did we deserve them or were they gifts?

The religious leadership criticized Jesus for gathering sinners around him. In response, he told the most famous parable about second chances ever recorded.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance is a sacrament of second chances. Also known as the sacrament of conversion, confession, or penance, the Sacrament of Reconciliation forgives sins committed after Baptism. We can sin after Baptism, for sin hurts God (it denies God's honor and love), ourselves (it denies our dignity as children of God), and other people (the Church). In spite of sin, God continually calls us back. How? God leads us back to himself and to the Church through his grace. This movement is called repentance or conversion; it consists of sorrow for past sins committed and a firm promise not to sin in the future.

The sacrament allows the penitent the chance for self-honesty, spiritual counseling, and the opportunity to right past wrongs. In the absolution, the priest recognizes the process of conversion in the penitent, and declares it complete. Indeed, sin has been forgiven.

The story of the Prodigal Son was as much a story of transition as it was of second chances. Let us remember that second chances are invitations to transition; let us consider the importance of celebrating second chances. Christianity is a lifelong celebration of second chances, not a presumption of God's mercy. That is why we have the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a chance to wipe the spiritual slate clean, a chance to start anew as a child of the Father.