

Sunday March 27, 2022

Fourth Sunday of Lent

**Parishioner Reflection**

*By: Mary Jean Giliberto*

*From Slavery to Freedom*

In the first reading for today, the Israelites arrive in the land of Canaan and eat of its produce. The manna, which sustained them on their long journey, ceases. The Lord says to Joshua “Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you.” We too are on a journey. We are on a journey to our spiritual home, which is heaven. When we enter heaven, we will have been purified of our slavery to sin, just as the Israelites were freed from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. God removes the reproach of sin from us through our repentance, through the sacrament of reconciliation, and through the merits of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Some translations of the Bible say that the reproach of Egypt was “rolled away” from the Israelites when they ate the produce of Canaan, and the place where this happened was given the name Gilgal, which means rolled away. We were freed from our slavery to sin and death when the stone was “rolled away” on Easter Sunday and Christ rose from the dead. The manna which sustains us on our earthly journey is the Eucharist. The Eucharist itself will not be taken away when we reach heaven, but the veil that hides it will be taken away. We will experience the Wedding feast of the Lamb in its fullest glory, and taste of the fruits of heaven. We will be freed from our bondage to sin and death, and we will experience the rich banquet of everlasting life in the promised land of heaven. Today’s responsorial psalm (Psalm 34) picks up the theme of the richness of the banquet of the Lord. “Taste and see the goodness of the Lord”. The Lord delivers us and saves us. When we look upon Him, we become radiant with joy.

In the second reading, St Paul tells us, “Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation”. The theme of a passing from slavery to freedom, which we saw in the first reading, is also present here. We pass from our old way of living (our bondage to sin) to our new life in Christ (who frees us from sin). This journey to freedom is achieved through our repentance and through the sacrament of reconciliation. The “ministry of reconciliation” that St Paul speaks of can be interpreted in two ways. One interpretation is that it refers to the sacrament of reconciliation, in which the priest acting in the person of Christ absolves the confessed sins of the repentant sinner. The other interpretation of the “ministry of reconciliation” is that it refers to our duty as Christians to forgive one another. Christ made this duty quite clear in the words of the Our Father, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

The Gospel reading for today is the story of the prodigal son. The prodigal son starts out on a quest for individual freedom, but he is mistaken about the true meaning of freedom and how to attain it. Sound familiar? In today's culture, so many worship the god of individual freedom. We live in a culture of "me" instead of a culture of "we", which has disastrous consequences. The pursuit of one's own desires at the expense of others does not lead to true freedom. Instead, we become enslaved by our desires. The prodigal son learned this the hard way. The good news is that it is never too late. We can change our ways. We can seek forgiveness from God and from those we have hurt in our selfish pursuits. True freedom is intimately linked to forgiveness. When God forgives us, and we forgive each other, we are at peace. The famine we experienced as a result of inordinate self love is replaced by a rich banquet of selfless love.