

Act of Worship at Home for Sunday 27 March

Invitation to worship

Let us worship God, having made a space in our lives to pause and reflect; let us listen to God and, in the stillness, receive God's guidance. Let us be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.

Let us pray

Almighty and all-seeing God, we thank you for this season of Lent: a time to reflect upon our discipleship, to consider our calling, to examine ourselves and to assess the health of our faith. Help us to be honest in this: to see ourselves as we really are. Help us to come to you now, acknowledging our faults, recognising our weaknesses and receiving your loving forgiveness which alone can make us whole, through the grace of Christ. Amen. Let us be assured that if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. Thanks be to God. Amen

Reading - One of the lectionary readings for today is from Luke chapter 15 verses 11-32: *Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' " "My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. "*

Reflection

Today is Mothering Sunday and although the story in today's reading concerns a father, it could just as easily have been written about a mother. Let's put the parable in context: fathers were the ones with family wealth and they were discouraged from distributing it during their lifetimes. But if they did so, they were still entitled to be supported from their resources. This makes what the younger son did all the more disgraceful – he took his share of his father's inheritance and then denied his father the means of support that was rightfully his. But we know that he came to his senses and recognised that he would be better off as one of his father's servants but also that he had wronged his father. He was brave to go home as he did not know what reception he would get. But his father welcomes him with open arms. The elder son cannot cope with this and says

some awful things. Again, the father shows love; he does not rebuke his elder son but assures him that his inheritance remains intact and invites him to join in the feast. There the story ends. We do not know what reply the elder brother made or what he did. Jesus wanted his audience to decide what the conclusion should be. Would the pious, law-abiding Jews welcome the prodigals and sinners when they returned or reject and condemn them? The same question faces us as Christians but also this story is asking us to realise the depth of God's love for us like any mother or father's should be. My parents forgave me on a number of occasions when I let them down and, though not always easy, I have forgiven my children when they have been a bit wayward. I do not see any other option for a parent. I love my children as God loves me, warts and all! Some mothers and fathers abandon their children. God never abandons us. The figure of the waiting parent is a powerful image of God. In the end, like the younger son in the far-off country, we have to see the error of our ways for ourselves, come to our senses, and change the direction we are traveling. Jesus assures us of the welcome that then awaits us. Lent is a good time to ask ourselves whether in certain areas of our lives we are dwelling in a distant country; a good time for remembering again our parent's house; a good time for heading home. Amen.

Our hymn is number 443 in Singing the Faith: 'Come, let us sing of a wonderful love'

Come let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came;
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
come and abide,
lifting my life till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride:
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

And now a few words leading into a special prayer for Lent by Pope Francis:

Loving God, we ask you to help us to:
Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.
Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
Fast from worries and trust in God.
Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
Fast from bitterness and fill our hearts with joy.
Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
Fast from words and be silent so we can listen. **Amen.**

Finally, a blessing: May Christ give you grace to grow in holiness, to deny yourselves, take up your cross and follow him and may the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you this day and for ever. **Amen**

Paula Littlewood