

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners:

Below is the last of my four sermons on “Spiritual freedom.” I hope that you have found this series of reflections helpful to your understanding of Lent.

On the Sundays of Lent I have been discussing how Jesus Christ came into this world, died on the cross and rose again to free us from slavery to sin and death. He wants us to enjoy the spiritual freedom He has won for us. We do this by **holding fast to our identity as God's children, by not giving in to fear and by remembering that our purpose in life is to love and serve the Lord.** The Gospel reading on the Prodigal Son presents us with the fourth key for maintaining the spiritual freedom Jesus won for us. The fourth step to spiritual freedom is the willingness to repent of the things we've done wrong. Every morning we should renew our commitment to serve the Lord.

The Parable of the prodigal son is the best loved of all His parables, the story of the Prodigal Son. The reason why this parable is so popular is because Jesus presents to us a wonderful description of what God the Father is like. Our Heavenly Father, like the father in the parable never stops loving us and never denies us the chance to begin again.

When the prodigal son demands his inheritance and leaves home he is essentially telling his father: “I want to be free of you. I don't want you to be a father to me anymore.” When we choose to enter into serious sin we are doing the same thing. We are rejecting our identity as God's children and proclaiming our independence. Any father who received such treatment from his son or daughter would naturally be hurt and perhaps angry. Some might even respond in kind by disowning the son and telling him not to come back. But the father in the parable, who is God our Father, does not react this way. God does not write us off. The door is always left open for His children to return and say “I'm sorry.” Even when we have sinned seriously He welcomes us home. In fact, as soon as we start for home He will come to embrace us with open arms.

All we need to do is to accept the Lord's call to repent and begin again anew. This is what Jesus means when He calls us to repentance. He invites us to trust in the Father's mercy and pick up the journey again with a clean slate, a pure heart free from the slavery of our past sins. When it comes to our sins the Lord wants us to get right with Him, get free and get back to where we are supposed to be on our life's journey. Through uncontrolled desires the prodigal son lost everything, even his dignity. However, he still retained the humility and the courage to acknowledge his sin. Because he was willing to do this he was able to begin again. The same possibility exists for each of us. The Lord's mercies are new every morning and each day we can begin again.

The parable of the prodigal son comes true for us every time we give up our sins and turn back to Him. How happy we are to discover that, just as Jesus says, our Heavenly Father is there with open arms. Lent is a good time for each of us to begin again by receiving the Lord's mercy and forgiveness through the Sacrament of penance.

Jesus Christ came into this world, suffered, died and rose again to set us free. Living the spiritual freedom He has won for us means *remembering our dignity as the children of God. It means trusting Jesus when He says: “Do not be afraid.” Being spiritually free means *knowing that the purpose and meaning of our lives is to love and serve the Lord. Being spiritually free means *being willing to repent of our sins and begin again when we have wandered off the path the Lord calls us to. Just as Jesus rose again free from the chains of sin and death, if we are faithful to Him, we too will experience that freedom.

With my prayers,

Fr. Conley