

Liturgy of the Word with Children
Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year C
30 March 2025
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Catechist Background

The story of the Prodigal Son is one of the most famous of Jesus' parables, and is found only in Luke's Gospel. These days it is sometimes called the "Parable of the Forgiving Father" or "Parable of the Two Sons" because people often don't know what 'prodigal' means (extravagant and wasteful). It is important to note that this is the story of two sons: one whose sins are obvious, and the other whose sins are not known but who seems self-righteous. We never definitively discover whether the elder son is able to let go of his angry self-righteousness and turn back to the father, but we do know that the younger son is forgiven and restored to his family. Although this Gospel reading is often familiar (and challenging) to adults, it may be a unknown to children.

This Sunday is *Laetare Sunday*, the mid-point of Lent at which we start to sense the coming of Easter, and as such the liturgical colour for today is rose (pink, which is really just a lighter, more joyful form of purple, the colour for Lent). *Laetare* is Latin for "Rejoice" (which is the first word of the Entrance Antiphon for Mass today) and so today is less solemn than other Sundays in Lent.

Setting the Scene

For the activity described below you will need a piece of paper for every child, writing materials, and a rubbish bin.

We Say Sorry

Leader: You come for us when we have strayed, Lord have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: You draw us to yourself, Christ have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Your love conquers all, Lord have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

We Pray (1)

Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending Jesus to us, to show us happiness and love. Amen.

Gospel Introduction

Remind the children what a parable is (they may remember from last week).

As it is a parable, remind them to think about who the characters in the story represent.

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Reflecting on the Reading with Children

This parable has three characters who represent others:

- Who do you think the father represents in this story? [*God*];
- Who does the son who left represent? [*us, and others who have made obvious mistakes*];
- Who does the elder brother, the other son, represent? [*us, and others who have made less obvious mistakes or who think they are better than others*];

Imagine you were one of the people in this story:

- How would you have felt at the end of this story if you were the younger son?
- How would you have felt at the end of this story if you were the older son?
- How would you have felt at the end of this story if you were the father?

We are in the position of all three of these characters at different times in our lives.

- Sometimes we do wrong things and need to be forgiven like the youngest son;
- Sometimes we are like the older son, and need to be reminded that we should be happy for other people when they return to knowing the right thing to do;
- Sometimes we are in the position of the father, and are encouraged to follow God's example of forgiveness to us.

Remind the children that no matter what we do, God always wants us to return to God's love and not to be cut off from it. God helps us do this.

- Tell them that for older children and adults there is a special prayer they can say with a priest called "Reconciliation" to help us say sorry to God for wrong things we have done and return to God's love.
- If your group contains any children who have received the Sacrament of Reconciliation, they could help explain it.

Response

- Ask the children to write/draw on paper something they have done for which they are sorry;
- When they are ready, one at a time, get them to crumple the paper and put it in the bin,
- Tell them this is a symbol of Jesus taking away the 'rubbish' ways we sometimes act.
- If there is time, play a party game or sing a cheerful song to symbolise the happy welcome we get when we give our rubbish to God for him to take away.

We Believe

Relate the Creed to what you have shared with the children by asking these questions and inviting the children to reply, 'I do'.

- Do you believe in God, the loving Father, who wants us to return when we go astray?
- Do you believe in Jesus, the Son, who came to show us the way to the Father?
- Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us and lives in our hearts?

We Pray (2)

Again, relate the Prayer of the Faithful to the Gospel reading by saying:

'We know God wants us to be happy, and so we pray...'

Leader: We pray for all leaders in the Church, that they may always act like the forgiving father, welcoming to all. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for teachers, social workers, police officers, judges and anyone with a job that helps keep people safe. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for anyone who does not have enough to eat or a safe place to live, that they, like the younger son in today's Gospel, find a place that welcomes them. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for anyone we know who, like the elder brother in today's Gospel, holds onto grudges. May they let go of their anger to make room for love in their heart. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: Almighty God, thank you for making us part of your family. We know you hear all our prayers and you want to give us what is best for us. We make all our prayers through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.