



## Fourth Sunday of Lent March 14, 2010 C

### BITS & PIECES TO REFLECT ON AS WE CELEBRATE LAETARE SUNDAY (Let us rejoice.....)

Traditionally known as *Laetare Sunday*, the Fourth Sunday of Lent marks the midpoint in the Lenten preparation for the Resurrection feast. Appropriately, each of the three readings characterizes one of the many facets of *Easter joy*. In the *first reading* from Joshua, the people of God are portrayed as celebrating for the first time the feast of their freedom in their own land; the joy is one of promises fulfilled. In the *second text* from Paul, the apostle joyfully proclaims the effects of Jesus' saving act, i.e., the reconciliation of all people to the Father. In the *Gospel*, the joy is that of "coming home" and rediscovering a father's forgiving and gratuitous love. Although Lent is a season of penance, it must be marked by the joyful enthusiasm and confidence today's reading communicates.

Guilt is never easy to admit, but when the guilty one knows that a loving Father with open arms waits to welcome him/her home, the road to repentance becomes easier and shorter (Luke). Repentance can be thought of as the only worthy response to the wondrous gift of reconciliation wrought by God in Christ (2 Corinthians). Such a gift of freedom and life should be celebrated often and joyfully (Joshua).

#### The story Dostoyevsky wanted read to him as he lay dying

*When Dostoyevsky, the Russian novelist, knew that he had but a little time to live, he made his children come into his room, and begged their mother to read the parable of the Prodigal Son. He listened with his eyes closed, absorbed in his thoughts. "My children," he said in his feeble voice, "never forget what you have just heard. Have absolute faith in God, and never despair of his pardon. I love you dearly, but my love is nothing compared with the love of God for all those he has created. Even if you should be so unhappy as to commit a crime in the course of your life, never despair of God. You are his children; humble yourselves before him as before your father, implore his pardon, and he will rejoice over your repentance, as the father rejoiced over that of the Prodigal Son."*

**Reflection questions:** What story from Scripture would you like read to you on your deathbed?

#### Quotations

The tragedy is not that things are broken.  
The tragedy is that they are not mended again.

*Alan Paton*

Vengeance is too little. Pardon is very much bigger and greater.

*Irène Lare, French resistance leader*

#### Yes, God loves the sinner, but he also expects change and conversion

Today's parable could easily communicate to us an image of a God who is soft on sin. We may wonder if the father was too lenient with a son who had committed a terrible crime against him. Any of us could be easily tempted to stray if mercy were so easily had. So let's look a little deeper. The following piece is by Fr. Paul Waddel, C.P., Professor of Ethics at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago.

*Yes, indeed, the father is exultant that his son who was dead has come back to life but it is also clear that he expects his son to leave his dissolute lifestyle behind. The son is welcomed home, but he is also expected to change, just as at Baptism, when every neophyte (new born) Christian is clothed in Christ, not only that he/she might begin a new life of peace, truthfulness, justice and joy, but also that they may renounce a contrary life that is darkness, division, falsehood and gloom. The clothing of the prodigal son in the finest robe indicates not only a fresh start but also a break with destructive past. The father welcomes his son home not so that he can repeat the past, but that he can reconstruct the future in hope. The father's wonderful show of mercy must be met by the son's commitment to letting go his past and beginning to learn anew what it means to be a son. A son who is a drug addict is forgiven by his parents. But when he returns home he is expected to reform life and do the painful work of freeing his life from drugs.*

**Reflection question.** In the parable, which son do we more identify with? Why?

## **Gift of Years—Growing Old Gracefully** **Sr. Joan Chittister O.S.B.**

Joan Chittister, now 72 years of age, is one of the most celebrated spiritual writers of our times. In this book she invites us to embrace older age as a natural part of life that is both active and contemplative, productive and reflective, and deeply rewarding. She encourages us to cherish the blessings of aging and to overcome its challenges. And she show us clearly that this is a special period of life—maybe the most special of them all. Older age gives us wisdom, freedom, and prosperity of another kind. Older age enlightens—not simply ourselves, but also those around us. To live these years well, we need to look at every one of them head up and alive. Life is not about age, about the length of years we manage to eke out of it. It is about living into the values offered every day, about growing older with grace.

*The Gift of Years* looks at the many dimensions of aging, the purposes and concerns, struggles and surprises, the potential and joys. It deals with the sense of rejection that comes from feeling out of it. It reflects on the temptation to isolate oneself from the changes taking place, and on the need to stay involved. It discusses issues of health and well-being and the need to put one's affairs in order. It describes what happens as old relationships end and shift, change and disappear in favor of the many new people and new challenges that come to take their place. It talks about the fear of tomorrow and the mystery of forever—and how to cope with it all. It is a panoply of central issues that emerge with age to bring us to the fullness of life, to make us new again.

And perhaps the most important dimension of older age, Joan Chittister illuminates, is to become aware of its profound purpose: These are the capstone years, the time in which a whole new life is in the making again. The gift of these years is not merely being alive, it is the gift of becoming more fully alive than ever.

The following are a sample of the forty (40) topics Sr. Joan speaks to: regret, meaning, fear, joy, adjustment, fulfillment, letting go, sadness, limitations, memories, nostalgia, loneliness, forgiveness, appreciation, faith, legacy.

### **Praise for the book.**

“It’s the best book I have read on the subject of aging, a dazzling work radiant with gems of insight on every page. It will be my spiritual reading in the days ahead. It is a book only for those of us who grow older every day!”

-Andrew Greeley, author of *The Great Mysteries*

“*The Gift of Years* brims with insight, pluck, verve, and courage—and trust that finally in God’s love ‘all will be well.’ it shows us both the joys and the challenges of growing older, and encourages us to discover the deep spiritual meaning that can come with older age.”

-Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking*

## ***St. Patrick’s Breastplate Prayer***

*As I arise today,  
may the strength of God pilot me,  
Your power uphold me,  
Your wisdom guide me.  
Your eye look before me,  
Your ear hear me,  
Your word speak for me.  
Your hand protect me,  
Your way lie before me,  
Your shield defend me,  
Your host save me.  
May Christ shield me today . . .  
Christ with me, Christ before me,  
Christ behind me,  
Christ in me, Christ beneath me,  
Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit,  
Christ when I stand,  
Christ in the heart of everyone  
who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of everyone  
who speaks of me,  
Christ in every eye that sees me,  
Christ in every ear that hears me.*

*St. Patrick*

## **Happy St. Patrick’s Day**

Have a blessed week,

*Le Saran*