



St. Thomas Church: established July 1, 1285 by King Vaclav II



March 5th and 6th 2016

The Fourth Sunday of Lent
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St. Thomas Church

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The Reflection of the Gospel

Today is called *Laetare Sunday*. In Latin, the word meaning *Rejoice!*, sets the tone or atmosphere for our Sunday liturgy. Last Thursday, we passed the halfway mark through the Lenten season. In two weeks we shall be celebrating Palm Sunday, Holy Week and the Resurrection. To encourage us on this last state of our penitential journey, the Church urges us to rejoice and take heart for "our salvation is near". Of course, we can conjure up at times, a myriad of excuses for basic indifference or disinterest in such a gospel message "of joy". To rejoice can be a chore! Today's gospel reading from Luke, the third evangelist, gives us motivation for being joyful in the Lord.

The story of the *Prodigal Son* was addressed to the Pharisees or professionally "holy observants of the Law" who prided themselves on being *the chosen ones*. Although addressed to hypocrites within earshot of those *sinners* thirsting for God's forgiveness, the parable could be entitled either a story of the *Merciful Father* or even more soberly that of an *Unforgiving Brother*. For a moment let us reflect on each of these qualities: prodigality, mercy and forgiveness. Set within the context of first century Jewish culture, a father before his death could make out a will in which the oldest son received twice the amount of the other son(s). But, for a son to request his inheritance *before* the father's death was a rank insult. What is further reprehensible in the younger son's behavior was his total disregard for all religious and ethical values. Driven by dire need he returns and is received immediately back into full grace and forgiveness by a merciful loving father "who runs out to meet him" upon his repentant return. The older son now becomes the focus of attention. His obstinacy and hard-heartedness are contrasted with the mercy of the father; even his industriousness stands out against his brother's spendthrift attitudes. The father, again, as with the youngest, goes out to his oldest son, his heir, and pleads not for some numb tolerance but for a spirit of understanding and forbearance.

The lesson is obvious. The Pharisees were so intent on doing good that they forgot the element of mercy that indelible sign of God's own attitude toward his creation. What Jesus proposes is that if we regard ourselves as sons and daughters of the One God than we must be prepared to imitate Him where there can be no feigning or cheap imitation of superficial religious attitudes. On this journey, therefore, let us put aside the pettiness, the hurts, the pained memories that so block our spiritual sights and "Be merciful as your Father is merciful". Can we or will we allow ourselves to be so divine?

The story of the Prodigal Son

- Typically, a son would receive his inheritance at the time of his father's death. The fact that the younger brother instigated the early division of the family estate showed a rebellious and proud disregard for his father's authority, not to mention a selfish and immature attitude.
- The father is a picture of the Heavenly Father. God waits patiently, with loving compassion to restore us when we return to him with humble hearts. He offers us everything in his kingdom, restoring full relationship with joyful celebration. He doesn't even dwell on our past waywardness.
- Reading from the beginning of chapter 15, we see that the older son is clearly a picture of the pharisees. In their self-righteousness, they have forgotten to rejoice when a sinner returns to God. Bitterness and resentment keeps the older son from forgiving his younger brother. It blinds him to the treasure he freely enjoys through constant relationship with the father.

Questions for Reflection:

Who are you in this story? Are you a prodigal, a pharisee or a servant? Are you the rebellious son, lost and far from God? Are you the self-righteous pharisee, no longer capable of rejoicing when a sinner returns to God? Maybe you've hit rock-bottom, come to your senses and decided to run to God's open arms of compassion and mercy? Or are you one of the servants in the household, rejoicing with the father when a lost son finds his way home?

A Small Lenten Fast!

St. Thomas is encouraging each of its parishioners to fast on the following Fridays of February by eating a bowl of rice and with the money you save, making a donation to the church which will then pass it along to the most needy! It's an easy way to fulfill a Lenten obligation and to savour the satisfaction that someone has benefited from your corporal work of Mercy. How pleased Holy Father Pope Francis would be with those of us who have taken the theme of this year, **the Year of Mercy** and made it part of our Lent.

Thank you in advance and at Sunday's Mass we'll let you know where you can contribute! And for those who can't fast on the following Friday, you can do it on another Friday in Lent!

Year of Mercy

"Merciful like the Father"

Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy:

1. to feed the hungry,
2. give drink to the thirsty,
3. clothe the naked,
4. welcome the stranger,
5. heal the sick,
6. visit the imprisoned,
7. bury the dead.

And let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy:

1. to counsel the doubtful,
2. instruct the ignorant,
3. admonish sinners,
4. comfort the afflicted,
5. forgive offences,
6. bear patiently those who do us ill
7. pray for the living and the dead."

Announcements and Ongoing Activities

*If you would like to receive a copy of the bulletin by email, please contact osaprag@augustiniani.cz

* Every Saturday at 9:00am **feeding of the homeless**, as a social service

* **Bible Study** takes place every Tuesday from 18:30-19:30 in Tagaste room.

*Wednesday at 18:30. Tagaste room takes place **Adult Religious education**.

*St Thomas' English Speaking Community now has a presence on **facebook**. Please 'like' our page and if you want to get more involved with the community, join our group!

* **Marriage Preparation:** The next one-day marriage preparation course (for the English speaking community) will be held by Fr. William on Saturday 12th March from 9:15am - 3pm at St. Thomas Parish for those who wish to participate.

*During **Lent season** every Friday at 6pm in the church will be the Stations of the Cross.

*Please note that in two weeks, on March 20, we will be celebrating **Palm Sunday** with the Czech and the Spanish community. The traditional blessing of palms will be held in The Infant Jesus of Prague Church from which the procession will begin and continue with Mass for the three communities in St. Thomas Church, at 11:00 am. Our English speaking Catholic community will sing the processional hymn *All Glory Praise and Honor to You Redeemer King*.

How to have a merciful Lent?

4. Lenten week

Gospel:

Return of the Prodigal Son – Luke 15,1-3.11-32

Main idea:

Forgiveness

Spiritual work of mercy for this week:

Forgive offences

What can I do?:

To forgive the one who hurt me.

To reconcile with someone who may not speak with you.

To reconcile with God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Notes on your person take with humor.

Not offend people.