

# Lent: Fourth Sunday of Lent

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## Preparation

### Background for Scripture Readings

#### First Reading

- The first reading recounts Israel's rebirth in the land of promise.
- As the people crossed the Jordan River, they celebrated Passover, just as they had when they crossed the Red Sea.
- The period of wandering in the wilderness was over.

#### Second Reading

- The main subject in Paul's second letter to the Church of Corinth is reconciliation.
- Paul stresses reconciliation with God, with himself, and with the Corinthian Community.
- Through Christ, sinners are reconciled to God.

#### Gospel

- In the presence of the Pharisees and Scribes, who are outraged by Jesus' treatment of sinners. Jesus tells the story of the return of the prodigal son.
- Today's parable shows that God's forgiveness is for everyone.
- God's mercy and love is immeasurable and beyond human understanding.

# Breaking Open the Word

## Leader Instruction

### Catechist Reflection Guide for Fourth Sunday of Lent

**First Reading:** Joshua 5:9a, 10-12—Jewish people celebrate Passover at Gilgal.

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7—The goodness of God.

**Second Reading:** 2 Corinthians 5:17-21—God reconciles us through Christ.

**Gospel:** Luke 15:1-3, 11-32—The Prodigal Son.

#### **Invitation to prayer** (30 sec.)

Ask the children to quiet themselves and sit comfortably. Begin the session with the Sign of the Cross. Have them take three deep breaths while you prompt them to relax as they breathe in God, our Father who loves us, Jesus Christ, his Son, our brother, and God's Holy Spirit who lovingly guides us.

#### **Listening for a word or phrase** to speak to your heart (3-4 min.)

Read the Gospel passage or the special phrase slowly and deliberately while the children are silently listening. Ask them to listen for a word or phrase that seems to be God's word for them today. Spend about 30 seconds as they select their "word" from God. Ask them to silently repeat that word or phrase and to write it on their heart.

**For Ages 5-6:** Help children sound out the words "**Let's have a party!**" Have them look at the illustration and explain that in today's Gospel reading, Jesus tells a forgiveness story about a father and son. Read Luke 15:11-32 from a children's Bible or tell it in your own words.

**For Ages 7-8:** Read aloud the words: "**Let's have a party!**" Have children look at the illustration and explain that in today's Gospel, Jesus tells a forgiveness story about a father and son. Read Luke 15:11-32 from a children's Bible or tell it in your own words.

**For Ages 9-11 and Ages 12-14:** Read aloud the entire Sunday Gospel, Luke 15:1-3, 11-32. Ask young people to listen for a word or phrase that seems to be God's word for them today. Spend about 30 seconds as they pick out their word or phrase. Ask them to silently repeat that word or phrase and to write it on their heart.

#### **Loving God through his word** (3-5 min.)

**For Ages 5-6:** Talk about the story in light of children's experiences of forgiving and being forgiven. Ask children what words or gestures they use to say, "I am sorry" or "I forgive you." Role play some of their responses with them. Have children complete the drawing activity. Close with the prayer.

**For Ages 7-8:** Talk about the story in light of children's experiences of forgiving and being forgiven. Ask them to share words and gestures they use to say, "I am sorry" or "I forgive you." Read the text aloud and emphasize God's forgiveness. Have children complete the drawing activity. Close with the prayer.

**For ages 9-11:** Ask young people to share their word or phrase. Give young people a short quiet time to read the questions on the handout and think about their responses. Engage the large group in sharing their responses. If there is time, talk about the non-forgiving actions of the older brother. In conclusion, talk about ways we can offer forgiveness to those who have hurt us. Close with the prayer.

**For ages 12-14:** Ask young people to share their word or phrase. Engage the group in conversation about the meaning of the parable by using the questions on the handout. Stress the different responses to sin that

are found in the Gospel verses on the handout. Compare the Father and the older son. Spend some time on the concept of isolating or failing to include those we see as "sinners" as well as those we may have a grudge against. Close with the prayer.

**Living the Gospel** words through the week (3-5 min.)

The handouts describe one or two ways children and young people can live this reflection on the Gospel through the week at home, school, or play. If appropriate, have them add one or two more personal choices to act on this week.