



DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

700 King Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8P 1C7

Children's Liturgy of the Word

Fourth Sunday of Lent

The Prodigal Son

Overview

The Fourth Sunday of Lent, known as "Laetare Sunday," embodies a vibrant theme of joy and hope, shining brightly amidst the reflective and penitential nature of the Lenten season. The liturgical readings for this day are rich in meaning, drawing attention to the parable of the Prodigal Son, which beautifully illustrates God's boundless mercy and unwavering forgiveness. At its core, today's Gospel explores not only the concepts of sin and forgiveness but delves deeply into the profound journey of reconciliation.

While forgiveness can be considered a solitary act, reconciliation is an intricate process that revives and restores relationships, bridging gaps between friends, families, and even entire nations. This transformative power of reconciliation invites us to heal old wounds and foster a renewed connection with one another and, importantly, with God. As we reflect on these themes, Laetare Sunday serves as a radiant reminder of the hope and love that accompany our spiritual journeys.

Leaders Reflection Questions

- † How have you experienced God's forgiveness?
- † How have you extended forgiveness?

Contents

Overview	1
Leaders Reflection Questions.....	2
How have you experienced God's forgiveness?	2
How have you extended forgiveness?	2
Background	3
The Liturgy	4
Procession from the main Church	4
Welcome	4
FIRST READING	5
RESPONSORIAL PSALM	6
SECOND READING	7
GOSPEL.....	8
Adapted Readings for Children	11
FIRST READING	11
RESPONSORIAL PSALM	12
SECOND READING	13
GOSPEL.....	14
Reflection	16
Prayer of the Faithful	18
Return to the church.....	19

Background

Joshua 5:9a, 10-12 The Israelites celebrate the Passover at Gilgal after entering the Promised Land. The Lord declares, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt," marking a pivotal moment of liberation and new beginnings. "Gilgal," meaning "to roll away," symbolizes the end of their wandering and the start of a new identity, reflecting God's faithfulness and the fulfillment of His promises.

Psalms 34:2-7 The psalmist calls the faithful to boast in the Lord and seek His presence, emphasizing deliverance and protection. It starts with a communal invitation to celebrate God's goodness, sharing personal experiences of seeking Him and finding relief from fears, highlighting that God hears the humble's cries.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 St. Paul teaches that faith in Christ transforms us into new creations. He emphasizes that God reconciles humanity through Christ and calls believers to share this message of mercy and forgiveness. The Church's mission is to embody God's love and invite others to experience reconciliation, grounded in the belief that Christ took on sin for humanity..

Gospel: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 The parable of the Prodigal Son is a profound narrative that illustrates God's boundless mercy and the joy of reconciliation. This parable serves as a central theme for the readings, encapsulating the essence of God's love for sinners. The setting involves tax collectors and sinners approaching Jesus, while the Pharisees grumble about His association with them. This context highlights the radical nature of Jesus' ministry, which seeks out the lost. The younger son's request for his inheritance and subsequent squandering of it represents humanity's tendency to stray from God. His eventual realization of his need for the Father reflects the journey of repentance. The father's compassionate response upon the son's return is a powerful image of divine mercy. He embraces the son, restoring his dignity and celebrating his return, which illustrates the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. The elder son's anger and resentment reveal the struggle of those who feel entitled to God's grace. The father's gentle reminder that all he has is also the elder son's serves as a call to recognize the inclusive nature of God's love.

The Liturgy

Procession from the main Church

After the opening prayer, when all are seated, the leaders come forward and stand facing the altar.

Priest: (in these or similar words)

My dear children, we send you forth so that you may listen to God's Word and think about how much he loves you. When you rejoin us, we will all pray and thank God for sending us his Son, Jesus, as our saviour.

Go in peace.

When most of the children have formed a procession, the leader with the book proceeds to the place of the celebration. The second leader usually walks behind the children. Upon arrival at the location of the celebration, the leader places the book on the prepared table.

Welcome.

The leaders assist the children in sitting and preparing. **Begin with the Sign of the Cross.** Help the children think and connect their actions as they touch their foreheads, shoulders, and stomachs. The leader may say the following prayer in these or similar words.

Let us pray:

(pause for a few seconds)

Dear God, thank you for your endless love and forgiveness. Help us to be like the father in the story, always ready to forgive and welcome others. Teach us to love one another and to celebrate when we come together again. Amen.Amen.

Invite the children to listen to the readings. Proclaiming all the readings is unnecessary; however, the Gospel is required.

FIRST READING

Joshua 5.9a, 10-12

Having entered the promised land, the people of God celebrated the Passover.

A reading from the book of Joshua.

- 9** The Lord said to Joshua,
"Today, I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt."
- 10** While the children of Israel were camped in Gilgal
they kept the Passover
in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month
in the plains of Jericho.
- 11** On the day after the Passover, on that very day,
they ate the produce of the land,
unleavened cakes and parched grain.
- 12** The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land,
and the Israelites no longer had manna;
they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

A period of silence is observed after the reading.

The word of the Lord.

Children: Thanks be to God.

A period of silence is observed after the reading.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 34.1-2, 3-4, 5-6 (R.8a)

R. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

- 1 I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise continually shall be in my mouth.
- 2 My soul makes its boast in the Lord;
let the humble hear and be glad. **R.**
- 3 O magnify the Lord with me,
and let us exalt his name together.
- 4 I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears. **R.**
- 5 Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.
- 6 This poor soul called, and was heard by the Lord,
and was saved from every trouble. **R.**

SECOND READING

2 Corinthians 5.17-21

Through Christ, God has reconciled us to Himself.

A reading from the second letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

Brothers and sisters:

- 17 If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new!
- 18 All this is from God,
who reconciled us to himself through Christ,
and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;
- 19 that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself,
not counting their trespasses against them,
and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.
- 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ,
since God is making his appeal through us;
we entreat you on behalf of Christ,
be reconciled to God.
- 21 For our sake, God made Christ to be sin who knew no sin,
so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God.

A period of silence is observed after the reading.

The word of the Lord.

Children: Thanks be to God.

A period of silence is observed after the reading.

The children stand for the Gospel. They sign themselves on the forehead, lips, and chest.

GOSPEL

Luke 15.1-3, 11-32

This brother of yours was dead and has come to life.

A reading from the gospel according to Luke.

- 1 Tax collectors and sinners were listening to Jesus.
- 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying,
"This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."
- 3 So he told them a parable:
- 11 "There was a man who had two sons.
- 12 The younger of them said to his father,
'Father, give me my share of the property
that will belong to me.'
So the father divided his property between them.
- 13 A few days later, the younger son gathered all he had
and travelled to a distant country,
and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.
- 14 "When he had spent everything,
a severe famine took place throughout that country,
and he began to be in need.
- 15 So he went and hired himself out
to one of the citizens of that country,
who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs.
- 16 The young man would gladly have filled himself
with the pods that the pigs were eating;
and no one gave him anything.
- 17 "But when he came to himself, he said,
'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare,
but here I am dying of hunger!
- 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him,
"Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;
- 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son;

- treat me like one of your hired hands."
- 20 "So he set off and went to his father.
But while he was still far off,
his father saw him and was filled with compassion;
he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.
- 21 "Then the son said to him,
'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;
I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'
- 22 But the father said to his slaves,
'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him;
put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
- 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it,
and let us eat and celebrate;
- 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again;
he was lost and is found!
And they began to celebrate.
- 25 "Now his elder son was in the field;
and when he came and approached the house,
he heard music and dancing.
- 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on.
- 27 The slave replied, 'Your brother has come,
and your father has killed the fatted calf
because he has got him back safe and sound.'
- 28 "Then the elder son became angry and refused to go in.
His father came out and began to plead with him.
- 29 But he answered his father,
'Listen! For all these years
I have been working like a slave for you,
and I have never disobeyed your command;
yet you have never given me even a young goat
so that I might celebrate with my friends.
- 30 But when this son of yours came back,
who has devoured your property with prostitutes,

you killed the fatted calf for him!"

31 "Then the father said to him,
'Son, you are always with me,
and all that is mine is yours.

32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice,
because this brother of yours was dead
and has come to life;
he was lost and has been found

At the end of the Gospel, the Minister of the Word proclaims, "The Gospel of the Lord."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Children: Glory to you, O Lord.

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'Father, give me a share of my inheritance.'
So the father divided his property between them.
- 13 A few days later, the younger son
travelled to a distant country,
and there he wasted his money.
- 14 "When he had spent everything,
a famine took place,
and he began to be in need.
- 15 So he went and hired himself out
to one of the citizens of that country,
who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs.
- 16 The young man would gladly have filled himself
with the food that the pigs were eating;
and no one gave him anything.
- 17 "But when he came to himself, he said,
'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare,
but here I am dying of hunger!
- 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him,
"Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;
- 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son;
treat me like one of your hired hands.'"

- 20 "So he set off and went to his father.
When the father saw him, he was filled with compassion;
ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.
- 21 "Then the son said to him,
'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;
I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'
- 22 But the father said to his slaves,
'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him;
put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
- 24 And they began to celebrate.
- 25 "Now his elder son was in the field;
and when he came to the house,
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- 26 He called one of the servants and asked what was going on.
- 27 The servant replied, 'Your brother has come,
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because he is back safe and sound.'
- 28 "Then the elder son became angry and refused to go in.
His father came out and began to plead with him.
- 29 But he answered his father,
'Listen! For all these years
I have been working like a servant for you,
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'Son, you are always with me,
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- 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice,
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- At the end of the Gospel, the Minister of the Word proclaims, "The Gospel of the Lord."
The Gospel of the Lord.
- Children: Glory to you, O Lord.

Reflection

The leader may offer this reflection in these or similar words. Remember the amount of time available to return to the main assembly. The leader may wish to reduce the number of questions. An excellent place to begin is the question:

What did you hear? *(Allow children to respond)*

This is one of the most beautiful stories Jesus ever told. It is a story about forgiveness, love, and second chances. The father in the story represents God, and the younger son represents us when we make mistakes.

Who in the story made a mistake?

The younger son made some bad choices—he took his father's money, wasted it, and ended up in a terrible situation.

What did the son do when he realized his mistake?

But as he slowly came to terms with his mistake, thoughts swirled in his mind, and fear gripped his heart as he considered the journey home. Would his father's disappointment darken the threshold they had shared so many times? The uncertainty gnawed at him, igniting a storm of anxiety as he imagined the look of anger or sadness on his father's face.

How did the father react?

As the father spotted his son, a wave of emotions overwhelmed him. He ran to the boy, heart racing with relief and affection. Embracing him tightly, he felt the weight of the past lift. With tears in his eyes, he whispered words of forgiveness, letting go of old grievances and embracing their enduring love.

Who does the father in the story remind us of? *(God, our loving Father.)*

What does this story teach us about God's love?

This reveals a stunning truth: God is perpetually prepared to extend forgiveness to us. Regardless of the missteps we take in life, God waits patiently with open arms, eagerly anticipating our return, ready to embrace us with compassion and love when we falter.

Following the reflection, the prayer leader invites everyone to stand to profess their faith. Recite the Creed or use the sample below to ask the children to respond.

The Creed

Depending on the time, a simple profession of faith may be made (see below).

Leader: Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth?

All: I believe.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, who gave his life for us?

All: I believe.

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts and gives us everlasting life?

All: I believe.

Leader: This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it.

Prayer of the Faithful

Leaders may begin the intercessions by announcing the needs they know. The leader may need to repeat and paraphrase the petition and conclude it with the cue for the response: we pray. All respond to each petition by saying, "Lord, hear our prayer." Sample intercessions are below.

Leader: **THE LEADER SAYS:**

Just as the father welcomed his lost son back home, God welcomes each of us with open arms. The response is: "Lord, hear our prayer." R: Lord, hear our prayer.

ASSISTANT:

For the Church, that she may be a welcoming home for all, especially those who feel lost or alone, just as the father welcomed his son back home. We pray to the Lord. R:

ASSISTANT:

For our families, that they may be places of love and forgiveness, where everyone feels valued and accepted, reflecting the compassion of the father in the parable. We pray to the Lord. R:

ASSISTANT:

For those who are sad or lonely, that they may feel the joy and love of Jesus in their lives. We pray to the Lord. R:

ASSISTANT:

For all who are sick or suffering – that God may bring them healing, peace, and comfort. We pray to the Lord. R:

THE LEADER SAYS:

Loving God, you are always ready to forgive us. Hear our prayers that we bring to you with trusting hearts. Amen.

Leader: Let's finish by making the Sign of the Cross together.

All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Return to the church.

Ask the children to return to the main assembly. Ask them to return quietly and think about what they have heard and are now doing. Be mindful of children having difficulty finding their families.

Readings: Lectionary for Sundays and Solemnities, CCCB, Ottawa, ON.
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