

Homily – Father Brad Neely
4th Sunday in Lent, Cycle C
Sts Peter & Paul: March 14, 2010
Josh 5: 9a-12; 2Cor 5: 17-21; Lk 15: 1-3, 11-32.

“Whoever is in Christ is a new creation:
the old things have passed away;
behold, new things have come.
And all this is from God.”

We are fortunate to live in a time
when “the old things have passed away---
spiritually speaking.
That is, part of the “old things”
was eternal death.
When death became a consequence of sin,
it was an eternal death.
What is that like?
Who knows?

In Christ, we are a new creation.
Instead of eternal death,
we have the possibility of *eternal divine life*.
Sounds like a better deal.
Not long ago in the daily Mass scripture readings,
we heard from the Book of Deuteronomy
as Moses tells the Israelites,
“You have before you death or life.
Choose life.”

Fr. Moses Neely of “Pearly Gates Real Estate”
knows of a blessed property called,
“Heaven’s Holy Acres.”
But anyone can seek out “Horn and Pitchfork Realty”
to put a down-payment on “Rathole Flats.”

Speaking of a *new age*, interestingly enough,
Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians today
is coupled with Luke’s Gospel passage
about the Prodigal Son.
I always used to think “prodigal” meant “repentant.”
“The Repentant Son.”
But prodigal means either “excessively wasteful,”
or “lavish and abundant.”
Either way, its a LOT of something.
The Prodigal Son is excessively wasteful.
He insults his father by asking for his inheritance
while his father is still alive,
and then spends it all wrecklessly.
But the Excessive Son has an Excessive Father---
lavish and abundant in *forgiveness*.
The Father wastes no time in showing his forgiveness---
so fast that the prodigal son
doesn’t even understand it initially.
The only character that is not prodigal in the story
is the brother---
unless we wanted to say

that he is prodigal in resentment.

I suspect most of us know
from our own experiences
something of the brother’s contempt.
He’s the spoiled sport here,
but at the same time his reaction
is perfectly understandable.
Here is where Paul’s statement
about being a new creation in Christ comes in.
Christ gives us the fullness of the revealing of God
in our human lives.
What Christ reveals is something
about the nature of God’s forgiveness.
The father in the Gospel story
represents our heavenly Father.
And entering--as we are able--into “the mind of God,”
we observe in the parable
that God’s forgiveness is given
on a moment’s notice,
and is lavish, and abundant---
in other words, prodigal.
God’s forgiveness is so lavish,
that the father appeals to the resentful brother,
who has seemingly been short-changed here,
to look at the situation in a different way,
actually, in a way that would cause him
to enter into “the mind of God.”
While *we* humanly *carry* hurts, jealousies,
resentments, and thoughts of revenge,
God forgives the repentant sinner,
and is most interested in his return to right relationship.
We could even say, ecstatic!

Jesus, who is criticized in the Gospel
for welcoming and eating with sinners,
has no interest in joining them,
but bringing them back into the fold.
He has an interest in teaching them
about the lavish forgiveness of God,
so that no one, for any reason,
has to stay separated from God,
but that God’s main interest is *restoring them*.

We live in this new age---
the new age of the heavenly gates being re-opened---
the new age of traveling to those gates
along the path of divine forgiveness.
The answer to the proposal of Moses
is a simple and logical one.
When give the choice between death and life,
choose life.