

## Sunday's Word

# Good people's anger of resentment

March 10, 2013

### FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

**Jos 5:9, 10-12**

First Passover in the Land

**Ps 34:2-7**

When the poor called out, God heard

**2 Cor 5:17-21**

In Christ a new creation

**Lk 15:1-3, 11-32**

Parable of the Prodigal Son

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031013-fourth-sunday-of-lent.cfm>



**REV. ROBERT  
R. BECK, D.MIN.**

Robert.Beck@loras.edu

The story of these two sons might remind us of Aesop's fable of the Ant and the Grasshopper. The ant worked hard and enjoyed the rewards of his labor. The grasshopper fiddled away the summer and starved at the onset of winter. But the parable differs from the fable in its treatment of the errant son. Aesop's grasshopper starved, but the prodigal son returned home to a celebration.

The prodigal one is shown in very human terms. Notice how he rehearses his speech before he returns. And then when he delivers it upon returning to his father, he is unable to finish because his father interrupts him with his impatient greeting.

The plight of the prodigal son is real enough. Stories of lost children are not uncommon in the news. They vividly remind us of the anguish that parents endure when losing track of a child. The drawing for today tries to evoke that trauma. The memory helps us understand the feelings of the father, who feels he cannot help but welcome his lost son back. The



implication is that God feels the same way toward the erring sinner who wishes to return.

But, of course, the parable does not stop with the first son's adventure. It moves on to the other. And here we find another story altogether. We find the resentment that sometimes fills the heart of the virtuous. Why should someone who doesn't even try to behave be saved? What about me? I have lived my life being careful and avoiding any need for rescue. Doesn't that count?

I think of this as the kind of sin reserved to the religious-minded, those who have

done their best to have lived as they ought to live. Only good people are subject to this kind of temptation. Only the virtuous are tempted to let this anger of resentment smolder inside them.

Frequently, in the Gospels, this is presented as the difference between the Pharisees and the followers of Jesus. The Pharisees, concerned with purity, are presented as insisting on strict entry requirements. But not so those who would be Christian. Jesus is shown announcing his ministry with a cry of "Repent." The only requirement is that one be a sinner. Well, maybe there is one more requirement. The one who is a sinner has to realize it.

Perhaps a word about the first reading is in order. We do not often have a selection from the book of Joshua. The account today tells about Israel's first Passover upon entering the Promised Land. Having left the desert, they celebrate a first harvest in their settlements. With that, the manna, no longer needed, stops coming. Here the lectionary would seem to be glancing ahead to Holy Week. We leave the desert of Lent for the celebration of the Passover.

*For reflection:* Some sins, like the older son's resentment, seem only available to the virtuous. Can you think of others?

*Father Beck is professor emeritus of religious studies at Loras College, Dubuque.*