

Conversion of Heart

Lenten Reflections on Mercy and Forgiveness

Week 4

READINGS: *Joshua 5:9a, 10–12; 2 Corinthians 5:17–21; Luke 15:1–3, 11–32*



“Your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found”
(Lk 15:32).

We are all prodigal children

In today's Gospel, we hear the parable of the prodigal son. This young man toiled in the business of his father, left his comfortable home, and began seeking to fulfill his worldly desires for women, excessive drinking, and other pleasures. When he ran out of money, he came to understand the error of his ways and returned home hoping to take the form of a slave since he had dishonored his father. Little did he know that, upon making this request, his father would have mercy upon him, forgive him for his poor decision, and welcome him into his rightful home. There he worked hap-

pily alongside his father in humble admiration for the rest of his days.

Such is the will and pleasure of our heavenly Father, who receives us again and again when we come to him asking for forgiveness. We are all prodigal children and undeserving to be called God's sons and daughters. Yet, that is what we are.

May we imitate the prodigal son of Jesus' parable and return to our Father every time we find ourselves in sin so that we can receive his mercy. Then, we too can work happily alongside Our Lord in humble admiration. Through spiritual

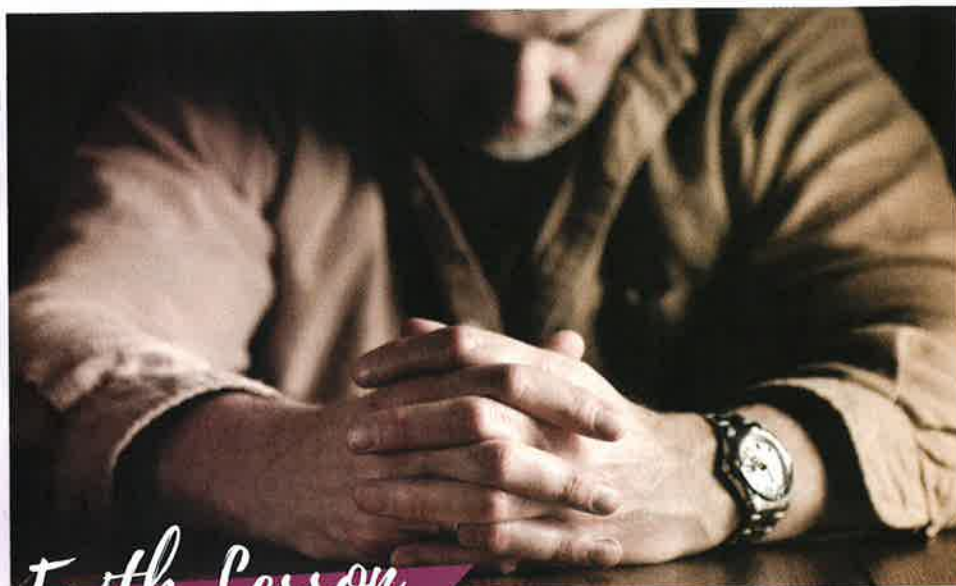
endurance in seeking forgiveness we draw closer to Our Lord and discover that we have no reason to ever leave his side.

For Reflection

- › How is your life like that of the prodigal son?
- › Are you as willing to forgive others as the prodigal son's father was to forgive him?
- › What does it mean to have spiritual endurance?

To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.

~ BLESSED JOHN HENRY NEWMAN



Faith Lesson

God can defeat sin and helps us fight temptation

Theodore Roosevelt was once quoted as saying, “Nothing in the world is worth having or worth doing unless it means effort, pain, difficulty.” We see this quote manifested every time we see a sports star hoisting a championship trophy above his head; or, much more appropriately, a missionary washing the hands of the poor children she serves breakfast to; or the mother of young children resting her head on a pillow after a long day of care-giving.

Indeed, the satisfaction of these individuals during these moments is intense, but so is their pain, their tiredness, and their willingness to continue the work the next day.



Prayer

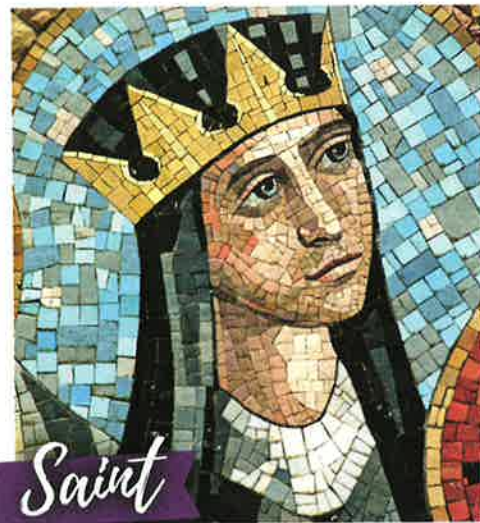
Such is the way of the determined soul. If those who endure to the end receive prizes in this world, should it not be so for our spirits, too?

Our souls were designed to endure the greatest of all trials — that of sin and its power over us. For humans it is impossible to defeat sin, but with God’s grace we are given the ability to endure temptations and overcome them.

St. Peter tells us, “Although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pt 1:6–7).

So, go. Endure your spiritual trials so that you can win the “unfading crown of glory” (1 Pt 5:4) that awaits you.

Jesus, my savior, you endured the hate of your own people, the suffering in the garden, the scourging at the pillar, the crowning of thorns, the carrying of the cross, crucifixion, and death. Allow me to endure all of life’s difficulties, small or grave, and unite them with your merciful passion. In doing so, may I be made worthy of the promise of your resurrection.



Saint

Working constantly to serve

Margaret of Hungary knew how to endure the difficulties of living a truly Catholic lifestyle. She was born a princess, the daughter of the king of Hungary. She was blessed with all the comforts that come with royalty, but in her zeal for souls she felt called to do more with her life. She joined a convent and became a poor nun working constantly to serve the needs of the poor and sick of her kingdom. She fasted continuously and served tirelessly; she was called to the heavenly kingdom at the tender age of 29. Having spent every last ounce of her earthly energy toward doing God’s will, she took her eternal crown of royalty as the princess of the one, true King of all creation.

Fasting TIPS

To have spiritual endurance means to get back up again even after you have failed. If you have failed in your fasting at any time during this Lenten season, that is okay. Don’t beat yourself up about it. Rather, get back up again, dust yourself off, and proceed with renewed promise.