**4th SUNDAY OF LENT [10th March, 2013]**

READINGS: Joshua 5:9-12 / 2 Cor. 5:17-21/ Luke 1-3, 11-32

THEME: SECOND CHANCE

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

There are times we wish we could have or be given a SECOND CHANCE. A worker misconducts himself and he is given the sack; he then pleads for a second chance. A bad decision leads to a big loss in business; and one looks for a second chance to do things right for the business to grow. A student fails an exam and looks forward to a second chance to do better. A husband/wife offends the spouse and pleads for forgiveness. A child disobeys his/her parents and pleads for the chance to do better.

The last example is similar to the parable of the prodigal son (today’s gospel reading). The prodigal son gravely offended his father by asking for his share of the property while the father was still alive [*it was as if he was telling his father, ‘you are living too long, you better die so I can inherit my share of your property’*]. He was given his share of the property alright but he was soon to squander it. Then in the most miserable state of wanting to eat food meant for pigs [*note that in the first place, the Jews saw pigs as unclean animals and they did not eat pork*], he regretted his offence against his father and decided to go and ask for a second chance: ‘I will arise and return to my father and say to him, “Father, I have sinned against God and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me like one of your servants”’ (Lk. 15:18-19).

Fortunately for the prodigal son, since he left home, the father had been looking forward to the opportunity to give him a second chance. Thus while he was a long way off home, the father caught sight of him and the ‘old’ man rather ran towards to his son to welcome him home as if he had never offended him. Indeed he was welcomed home like a hero, with finest clothes, a ring of legitimate inheritor, new shoes and feasting. This is simply incredible! But Jesus says this is how God gives us a second chance when we are truly contrite for our sins and confess them. **Indeed, from the moment we sin, God looks for the opportunity [of our repentance] to forgive us.**

You may, however, be saying that your sin is too great to be forgiven. Beloved, I wish to remind you that there is no sin greater than God’s mercy and forgiveness (*cf*. Ps. 103):

* Is our sin idolatry? Remember, the prodigal son sought to control his own life and destiny; to have nothing to do with his father; that was a kind of idolatry and yet he was given a second change. So, if we have also ignored the Living God and sought to control our lives and destinies by following other ‘gods’, the Living God says, ‘I want to give you a second chance; I want to forgive you; so return to me!’
* Is it fornication or adultery? Remember, the prodigal son spent his life with prostitutes yet he was forgiven; so ours can also be forgiven. God is saying, ‘return to me, for a second chance!’

Beloved, whatever be our sin, God is saying let us return to him to enjoy the grace of a second chance. But probably you are saying, I have had my second chance already and I have squandered it. Beloved there is still good news: for God gives us not only one second chance but many second chances, for as long as we live. If God wants us to forgive others 70 x 7 times, then he gives us 70 x 7,000 ‘second chances’. This simply means that he forgives us every time we repent and ask for a ‘second chance’.

And why is God so eager to forgive us, and as often as we plead for his mercy? It is because, as St. Paul explains, by dying on the cross the Son of God has made amends for us already: ‘For our sakes God made Him [Jesus Christ] who did not know sin to be sin , so that in Him we might become the very holiness of God’ (2 Cor. 5:21).

In other words, when we sin, God (like the father of the prodigal son who overlooked the offence done to him) sees not our sin, but the sacrifice of Calvary, by which we are given the new clothes and shoes of holiness, as well as the rings of the inheritors of heaven. Beloved, as St. Paul says, ‘all this has been done by God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ. … I mean that God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting the transgressions of men [and women] against them’ (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

Beloved, how I wish the repentant thief of Calvary was here to testify to the gracious second chance that God is offering all of us! Let us request for our second chance right now (PRAY AFTER ME):

LORD JESUS, I AM IN NEED OF A SECOND CHANCE RIGHT NOW! YOU GAVE THE THIEF ON THE CROSS WHO REPENTED, A SECOND CHANCE AND THE JOY OF PARADISE! SO, OVERLOOK MY MANY SINS, AND GIVE ME TODAY THE JOY OF A SECOND CHANCE! AMEN!