4th.Sunday of Lent (Year C). (March 27, 2022); Jos 5:9, 10-12; II Cor 5:17-21; Lk 15:1-3, 11-32.

**STORY: A Father’s Forgiveness:** A Spanish Newspaper El Liberal, carried a touching story about a teen-aged boy, Paco, and his very wealthy father who had a falling out, and the young man ran away from home. The father was crushed. After a few days, he realized that the boy was serious, so the father set out to find him. He searched high and low for five months to no avail. Finally, in a last, desperate attempt to find his son, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper. **The ad read, "Dear Paco, Meet me at the Hotel Montana noon Tuesday. All is forgiven. I love you. Signed, Your Father**. On Tuesday, in the office of Hotel Montana, over 800 Pacos showed up, looking for love and forgiveness from their fathers. -- What a magnet that ad was! Over 800 Pacos!! We all hunger for pardon. **We are all “Pacos” yearning to run and find a father who will declare, “All is forgiven.”**

The fourth Sunday of Lent which marks the midpoint in the Lenten preparation for Easter, is traditionally, called **Laetare Sunday (Rejoice Sunday).** This Sunday is set aside for us to recall God’s graciousness, extravagant mercy and compassion, and to rejoice because of these virtues God bestows on us. That is to say, in many ways we have been dead, but through God’s grace we have come to life again; we have been lost but have now been found. And so we have every reason to rejoice.

**Lesson:** Hence, in the Gospel, the joy is that of a young son’s “coming home,” where he discovers and is healed by the reality his father’s forgiving and gratuitous love. It is also the story of a loving and forgiving father who celebrates the return of his prodigal son by throwing a big party in his honor, a banquet celebrating the reconciliation of the son with his father, his family, his community, and his God. That’s why Charles Dickens, called it **“the greatest short story in the world".** By this he meant that, it is really the Parable of the Forgiving Father, the story of Divine love and mercy for us sinners, and a love that is almost beyond belief.

**Summary:** Hence, the common theme of joy resulting from reconciliation with God and other human beings is announced to all of us present in this Church – an assembly of sinful people, now ready to receive God's forgiveness and His Personal Presence as a forgiving God in the Holy Eucharist. The lesson of Divine mercy to sinners is shown by the Father’s reception of the returned younger son. Moreover, a stern warning is given to the self-righteous people by presenting the dialogue between the father and his older son. Here too the father assured the elder son of his continuing love and of the son’s secure inheritance and place in the family by saying, **“All I have is yours.”** Thus, the father symbolizes the loving and unconditionally forgiving Heavenly Father who is excessive, extravagant, and generous with His forgiveness and mercy.

**Life message:** We need to accept the fact that we are all prodigal children who have squandered our inheritance from our Father. By this I mean, that there is a spiritual famine even in countries with a booming economy. Because of this spiritual famine, we resemble the younger son who lived with pigs. Examples of this spiritual famine can be seen in drug and alcohol abuse, fraud and theft in the workplace, murders, abortions and violence, premarital sex, marital infidelity, and priestly infidelity, as well as in hostility among and between people. Sometimes this **"spiritual famine”** exists in our own families and can be seen when we condemn some of our family members, and even contribute to the death of some of them by refusing to associate with them. Let us accept the fact that we have been squandering God’s abundant blessings not only in our country and in our families, but also in our personal lives. Nor should we ever judge another as unworthy of our forgiveness or of God’s mercy, because all love is unconditional (CCC #2843,44).