

Fr. Romeo Homily
March 31, 2019
Fourth Sunday of Lent (C)

It is said that some people go to confession with the idea that the aim of the sacrament is to change God's attitude towards them, to make him friendly again. The penitents go to a priest, admit their guilt and are absolved. This idea is that God withholds his forgiveness until penitents seek it and show that they deserve it. First the sinner repents; then God forgives. In other words, the penitent's attitude changes God's attitude and now God is ready to again give his friendship. Such an understanding of the sacrament of reconciliation is widespread. Unfortunately, it is all wrong and contradicts today's second and third readings.

In what Paul writes to the Corinthians—as in the rest of the New Testament, incidentally—it is never, not once, stated that God is reconciled to us. On the contrary, Paul always says that we are the ones in need of reconciliation and that God is the one doing the reconciliation in us. He reconciles us to himself. When the verb “reconcile” is in the active voice, it is always God or Christ who is the subject of the verb (they do the reconciling) and humans are the direct object of the verb (they are the ones being reconciled). Conversely, when the verb is in the passive voice, humans are always the ones being reconciled, and the agent of the verb is always God or Christ (they are the ones doing the reconciling). This grammatical consistency is theologically quite significant. For God does not need to be reconciled, never having as it were “turned his back” on us. It is rather we who, by sinning, have turned our backs on God. Reconciliation, therefore, will consist in introducing a change in us, not in God. Hence we can understand Paul's pressing exhortation, “Let yourselves be reconciled for God!

The same idea is powerfully expressed in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which we have just heard. When the son decided to return home and the Father was able to catch sight of him, “while he was still a long way off”. Did the father, when this happened, wait for his son to reach him? No, he ran to his son. Forgetting his age and the oriental rules of deportment for a rich personage like him, he ran out to meet his son. Did he scold him then or wait for at least a

gesture of apology? No, he threw his arms around his son's neck and kissed him again and again. The father was not interested in his son's motives for returning. His forgiveness had nothing legal about it, it was pure affection. He did not need to be reconciled to his son, for he had never stopped loving his son with a perfect love. Only the son needed to be reconciled to his father.

The message of these two readings is clear: God is always on our side. He always loves us and never changes in his love. As the Bible tells us, "God is Love"! Those three words are the key to the universe (creation), just as they are the key to our destinies (our salvation). Once we begin to understand them, then we heartily join the Psalmist and repeat with him every day of our lives, "Taste and See the goodness of the Lord".