



**Fourth Sunday of Lent [Laetare Sunday]**  
**† Sunday 31st March 2019**

In England and Wales

Cycle of Prayer – Candidates for the Sacraments, Penitents and Wanderers  
Keynote: Called to renewal, reconciliation and friendship with God

**Book of Joshua 5: 9-12**

For the Israelites the land of Egypt represented oppression, sin, death, slavery and darkness. Having escaped, and after years of wandering in the wilderness all this is left behind as at last the People of God enter the Land of Promise. They *'kept the Passover there on the fourteenth of the month... they tasted the produce of that country, unleavened bread and roasted ears of corn'*. This journey – from slavery, through the hardships of the wilderness – is an image of our own journey of faith. We may encounter arid times of struggle, and also times of great joy and experience a sense of liberation. So as a new life begins for God's People, this Passover celebration marks a new beginning for us. If we are to enjoy the freedom and blessings of being God's children then we are to undergo a new creation – a 're-creation' – in our lives too, as we prepare for our own Passover with Christ at the Great Vigil at Easter.

**Responsorial Psalm 33 (34)** – A song in praise and fear of God

**Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 5: 17-21**

This reading is also about re-creation, renewal, reconciliation and the new start. *'For anyone who is in Christ'* says Paul, *'there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here. It is all God's work.'* The apostle is talking about the reconciliation, the renewed friendship that now exists between God and mankind because of Christ's death and resurrection. This new friendship, this freedom from the effects of sin and death, is offered to each of us personally – *'to anyone in Christ'* – to anyone who belongs to the believing community that is Christ. It is for us to seek this reconciliation, then *'God... not holding our faults against us... entrusts to us the news that we are reconciled. So we are ambassadors for Christ.'* As Easter draws near, maybe it is time now to give this some serious thought and action?

**Gospel according to Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32**

Jesus' critics challenge him accusing him for keeping company with sinners, and the social outcasts of his day. The parable of the Prodigal Son might be better called the parable of the loving father. This is Jesus' way of answering the critics. The story of the two brothers is so well known that we may need to give close attention to the events described. The younger son, is a wastrel, who has become ritually unclean, even lowered himself to feeding pigs – worse than a Gentile in Jewish eyes – yet *'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly.'* Such behaviour by an elderly Semitic head of family was at best undignified, or worse, for it would also have made him ritually unclean!

But it shows that no matter how far the sinner may be from home, God the heavenly Father is watching and waiting for the return. Ready to welcome us tenderly with genuine forgiveness. This reconciliation is also available to the dutiful son who stays at home. For we should not lose sight of the needs of this son, nor does his patient and caring father overlook him and his needs: *'My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours... it is only right that we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found.'*

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Note: Readings Year A may be used and the Second Scrutiny of the Elect may take place