

4 Lent C

March 31, 2019

St. Patrick

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From the Gospel of St. Luke—

**“While the son was still a long way from home, the father saw him and was moved with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him tenderly.”**

The Rose Bowl football game on every January 1<sup>st</sup> is called the “Granddaddy of all Bowls.” It was the first of the bowl games, beginning in 1902.

Ninety years ago, in the 1929 Rose Bowl game, California’s Roy Riegels picked up a Georgia Tech fumble and rumbled 65 yards to the end zone. The only problem: He ran the wrong way, and it eventually cost his team the game.

These days, you’d see the television cameras aimed on the head coach yelling expletives at a player after such a huge blunder. At halftime Roy Riegels was waiting for Coach Price to tear him apart. Instead, the coach came up to Riegels, and put a gentle hand on the player’s shoulder and said, “The game’s only half over. Give it your all” (1).

Roy Riegels did. He was given a second chance.

St. Patrick’s: We’re at our halftime in Lent. And we celebrate the “God of Second Chances.”

Jesus told the story, the parable, about the Prodigal Son in order to illustrate to us that ours is a God who is reckless in compassion and forgiveness. In telling the story, Jesus paints the picture of a gesture which gives touch to God’s mercy. In the story, the father envelopes his fallen-away son within his arms. He kisses his son again and again. That son would never forget the embrace and would always cherish those kisses.

Tell me: *Do you remember ever having received a tender embrace of reconciliation and forgiveness?*

Gestures often say more than words. They powerfully told the prodigal son he had a “second chance.” He belonged to the family.

At halftime, the coach “put a gentle hand of the player’s shoulder.” That player, wallowing in his mistake, got the clear message from his coach that he was still very much a part of the team.

St. Patrick’s: Way back in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the great teacher Pope Saint Leo the Great taught this in a Lenten sermon: **“The special note of the paschal feast is this: the whole church rejoices in the forgiveness of sins”** (2).

Yes, we’re in the halftime of our Lent, called “Laetare Sunday,” that is, “*Rejoice Sunday*.” Oh, I hope each of us, and all of us as a parish, truly experiences Jesus’ “gentle hand on our shoulder,” or his embrace of unconditional love. Now, I know that “confession,” the Sacrament of Reconciliation, is out of vogue these days, kept on the shelf of olden times. When I “go to confession” to a priest in our diocese, Father Richard Coy, after he gives the church’s prayer of pardon, he does what the church recommends. He lays hands on my head, invoking the Holy Spirit. I love that gesture. It’s that touch, a gentle sign, which I feel, experience, and remember—truly rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins. This coming Wednesday, we as a parish will celebrate our Lenten Penance service at St. Peter’s Church. I especially invite those who haven’t gone to confession in quite a while.

This week Bishop David Talley officially begins his ministry as our new bishop. Almost 50 years ago, when this new Diocese of Memphis was founded, the day after all the hoopla when the first bishop here was ordained...well, the day after all the dignitaries left, he went to his “office.” It was an abandoned high school building. In the basement, where the students’ cafeteria had been, they put his “office,” meaning a desk, his chair, and in front of the desk, two folding chairs. That first bishop was sitting alone in his chair, and two elder priests came to visit him, Father Paul Clunan and Father Willie Kleiser. Only thing on the bishop’s desk were a phone and a list of the priests. Our first bishop, completely new to the area, picked up the list of the names of the priests, and asked his two visitors, “Tell me something about the priests and this diocese?” Father Kleiser put it concisely, “Bishop, it’s no Rose Bowl team here!”

Friends: Regardless, even when we ramble 65 yards in the wrong direction like that prodigal son did, let’s allow Jesus to “place his gentle hand on our shoulder.” Let’s truly experience his compassion and forgiveness. Then, giving his sure promise of grace, Jesus will tell us this Sunday, “The game’s only half over. Give it your all.”

That’s worth rejoicing.

- (1) As told by Mark Link, S.J., in Action 2000: Praying Scripture in a Contemporary Way (Allen, Texas: Thomas More, 1993), pg. 84.
- (2) Saint Leo the Great, from Sermo 6 de Quadragesima, 1-2; PL 54, 285-287; reproduced in The Liturgy of Hours, Book II, pg. 60.

*General Intercessions*

*March 31, 2019*

*Fourth Sunday of Lent*

**Lead all of us on this *Laetare* Sunday truly to rejoice in the unconditional love of our Savior, Jesus; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Make your church a place of welcome for all people; and empower Bishop David Talley to lead wisely, to serve humbly, and to enlist us to join with him in crafting our future boldly; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Instill children with a love for natural beauty and care for the earth; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Help us to share one another's burdens, especially the most vulnerable in our midst—the sick; the homeless and the poor; the elderly and forgotten; immigrants and refugees; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Grant eternal life to all who hope in you, especially Harrel Crone, Janie Bobbitt, and the infant child Matthew Gifford, Jr.; we pray to you, O Lord—**

