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By Father Albert Shamon Guest columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 15:1-3, 11-32; (R1) Joshua 9:10-12; (R2) 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

The theme of Sunday's readings is reconciliation. Lent is a time to be reconciled to God through a good con-

In the first reading God speaks of reconciliation: "Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you."

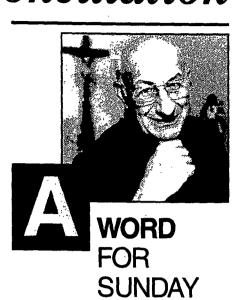
Joshua was Moses' successor. Moses led God's people out of Egypt; Joshua led them into the Promised Land.

Moses led God's people to freedom; Joshua guaranteed it by winning for them a land they could call their own - private property is the safeguard of freedom.

Moses began the march of God's people to freedom with a Passover meal; Joshua ended their march with a Passover meal.

Moses led God's people through the desert for 40 years and fed them with manna; Joshua, by conquering Canaan, ended their wanderings and their need for the manna.

Joshua completed God's reconciliation with His people: "I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you." The Hebrew word for "re-



moved" is gilgal. So they named the place where all this happened "Gilgal." Here they were at home at last. Home, reconciled with God through His mighty deeds.

St. Paul speaks of reconciliation in the New Testament. Five times he uses the words reconciliation and reconciling. Again, Paul makes it clear that reconciliation is from God.

In Greek the word for reconciliation is allaso, which means "to change". - to change one's relationship with another so that enemies become friends and prodigals are reinstated as sons.

Reconciliation, we must remember, implies change in us, not in God. God is changeless. God is love. He loves us always. It is never God who turns from us; it is we who turn from God. Sin ruptures our relationship with God; reconciliation renews it.

Reconciliation is affected by God Himself through the sacrament of reconciliation. In confession, it is God who reconciles us to Himself. Thus in the formula for sacramental absolution, the priest says: "God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son, has reconciled the world to himself ..."

Thé second important thing in confession is to realize that we must want to be forgiven. "I will break away and return to my father ...'

The third point is that the father in confession is the priest. Some people challenge going to confession to a priest. They say, "Why do I have to tell my sins to a priest?" St. Paul has given the answer: "God has given us the ministry of reconciliation ... making us (his priests) ambassadors of Christ."

Reconciliation is exemplified in the parable of the prodigal son. The hero is not the prodigal, but the father - the word "father" is used 14 times in the parable. The motive of the son's return is anything but noble. He is miserable and starving, the servants in his father's house are far better off. With such imperfect contrition, he decides to go home and make his con-

He does. Faith goes an inch, grace comes a mile. The father doesn't keep his son waiting at the door - he rushes out to meet him. He doesn't say, "I told you so." No, he throws his arms around him and kisses him and reinstates him completely.

Likewise, God's pardon of our sins is not so much a response to our confession of them as an expression of His great mercy and love for us. The sacrament of reconciliation is the sacrament of God's undying love and mercy for us.

The one discordant note in the parable is the elder son. He's envious: 'You never made a party for me." He's judgmental: "This son of yours has spent his money with loose women." He's cruel: he repudiates his brother, "This son of yours ..." He needed forgiveness as much as the prodigal.

The danger we must all avoid is to seek reconciliation with God and refuse it to other people.

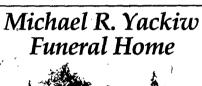
"Virtue is nothing but well-directed love."

-St. Augustine

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