

This parable of the prodigal son is perhaps *the* most beloved story in the bible. There are many themes and approaches one could select, but at this point in Lent the themes of repentance and forgiveness are most appropriate.

The younger son is presented as the model of one in dire need of repentance and forgiveness. He had spent his inheritance foolishly – prodigally; he had acted immorally; as the feeder of pigs, he had hit the absolute bottom; as far as Jews were concerned, you couldn't go any lower. What does he do? Instead of wallowing in self-pity and despair, he takes positive action: he makes a determination: to return home, to admit his guilt, to ask for forgiveness, and then to accept whatever his father would give him. On arriving home, he does exactly that: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you."

In our day and age, this is something we don't see very often; today everybody has an excuse for why it's not their fault – why it's not wrong. We see it all the time on TV: politicians, athletes, actors and other public figures make excuses for themselves.

Accepting personal responsibility has become the last resort when they run out of all other excuses. It's different with the prodigal son: he admits that he has sinned; he takes responsibility for his own actions.

This beautiful parable contains a set of important biblical truths. It says that we can turn our lives around; we can go home again – like the younger son in the story. It says that

God wants our repentance and wants to forgive us; it says that God never gives up on us – like the father in the story. It says that repentance precedes forgiveness; and forgiveness flows from repentance.

At this point in Lent, it's time for each of us to do what the prodigal son has done: to admit our sinfulness, to go to the father and seek forgiveness. No excuses. No putting it off to some future unknown date. Now is the time to hear the father's words: "let us celebrate with a feast; this child of mine was dead, and has come to life again; was lost, and has been found."