

## HOMILY FOR 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT March 18, 2007

### Introduction

God's abundance shines through today's readings from Joshua and the Gospel of the Prodigal Son. For forty years the refugee Israel nation received their daily food, their manna, directly, one might say, from God. Then, as the 1<sup>st</sup> reading recounts, they entered the Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey. In the Gospel Jesus tells us of the forgiving father, the God-like figure, who runs to embrace his wayward son long before he reaches home. Abundance of material sustenance; abundance of merciful love.

### I

It's interesting to note that in both readings people have to reach for, seek out and make proper use of God's abundance. The Israelites had to go out in the morning and retrieve the manna. There was quite enough for everyone; no one needed to hoard for the following day, and if indeed anyone did that, the manna went putrid. (This abundance and the restriction on taking more than one's share for the day stands as a lesson for our consumer society.)

Likewise, the prodigal son had to "get up and go to the father's house", he had to reach out for the parent's abundant forgiveness.

### II

It strikes me that we as a nation are similarly in need of calling of God's abundant forgiveness. This past Friday evening at Washington National Cathedral that theme was a major dimension of the prayer vigil related to the war in Iraq in which thousands of us participated. Likewise each Friday at noon during the Lenten season dozens of people gather to ask God's pardon for the war.

Many people have an instinctive understanding that Lent goes far beyond our individual sins and faults. They understand that we are in a "Jonah time" once again, begging God, just as that prophet did in ancient Nineveh, for the very soul of our country.

### III

Not everyone, however, sees Lent this way. Just in the past few days I heard about the irate benefactor of one Catholic organization, who insisted with them that the United States has nothing for which to beg God's forgiveness.

And yesterday during the anti-war demonstration at the Pentagon, we noticed one heckler holding a sign which read – pardon the language – "Peace Sucks!".

### Conclusion

I believe that the very soul of America is at stake in this moment of our history. Or as Jim Wallis of Sojourners/Call to Renewal said at the Cathedral during Friday evening's peace vigil, we are faced with a matter of faith, Christian faith with regard to the direction of our nation.