

Readings: *Joshua 5: 9 – 12; Ps. 33(34): 1 – 6; 2 Corinthians 5:17 – 21; Luke 15: 1 – 3, 11 – 32.*

Last Sunday's Readings led us to consider the call of the Lord to repentance. Today's readings take us a step further on our Lenten journey with the theme of a new start.

In the Old Testament reading the people of Israel have come to the end of their forty years wandering in the desert and have crossed the river Jordan into the land of Canaan. They have arrived at the time of the first full moon of Spring, the anniversary of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. For forty years God has fed them with the mysterious 'food from heaven', which came to be called 'manna' (which in Hebrew is a question 'What is it?'). Now, on the day after Passover, *the manna stopped falling, so the Israelites fed from that year onwards on the produce of the land.* It was a new start under their new leader Joshua.

In the New Testament Reading Saint Paul draws out the implication of the reconciliation between God and the human race which has been made possible through the death of Christ, and which the apostles have been commissioned to announce. It is simply this: *For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now a new one is here.* God's side of the work of reconciliation is accomplished, but the human side must go on for as long as history lasts. So he appeals *Be reconciled to God.*

Each human being must make a new start in this way. And in each generation the Church must continue the work of the apostles as *ambassadors for Christ.*

The Gospel reading is the familiar parable which we usually call 'The Prodigal Son', although that title ignores the generosity of the forgiving father and the contrasting reaction of the elder son. Here, too, there is a new beginning. The younger son, having made a complete mess of his old life, decides that the only solution is to make a completely new start – if necessary, as a servant in what was once his home. So he returns – but the new start turns out to be far better than he dared hope. For him *there is a new creation, the old one has gone, and now a new one is here.* For the Father was waiting and longing for his son to return.

Each Lent we Christians have the chance of 'a new start'. We have a Joshua – for Jesus is the same name in Greek – who will lead us forward in the new life we celebrate at Easter.