

### **Third Sunday of Lent – March 19-20, 2022**

So far in Lent, though the difficult expectations in being a disciple of Christ have been shown to us, there has been a lot of encouragement for us in the Sunday readings to help us persevere in our Lenten and life-long journey into the fullness of life that God has for us in this life and in the life to come. We were reassured that Jesus understands our temptations and will give his power over them. Last Sunday in the transfiguration we were shown where Jesus is leading us if just trust him and listen to him.

This Sunday, we are also encouraged by the parable of the fig tree at the end of the Gospel that our God is merciful and a God of second chances, but in today's readings we also hear a clear and unambiguous warning that, whether it be Moses or ourselves, we need to respond to God's call and graces that he has given to us and that the time is now.

In today's Gospel Jesus points out that most of those in his audience believed that those who died tragically or in unexpected ways must have been sinful. This is not so he insists, but it is a reminder that all of us have to repent and seek to live holy lives right now for we never know when we ourselves might perish.

Confidence is good, but complacency is unacceptable. St. Paul writes: "Whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall." As we celebrate this Third Sunday in Lent, in what ways have we become complacent in our confidence?

In essence, Jesus gives us two choices in today's Gospel: grow or die. While this may sound overly dramatic, we encounter this very choice every single day. The gardener convinces the owner of the vineyard to let him cultivate and fertilize the fig tree for another year to see if it will respond and bear fruit. If not, then he may cut it down. Our God is a God of second chances. We see this often throughout Jesus' ministry. There will come a time, however, when we

will have to answer to God. Did we use the resources God has given us to bear fruit in the world?

Today's Gospel is a good checkpoint of sorts as we enter this third week of Lent. Have we been using the time we have to cultivate our relationship with God and others? Have we generously shared our gifts and resources with others? Are we making the most of each day?

God didn't create us just to take up space in this world. He wants a little more from us than that. He wants us to trust him, to love him, to grow in holiness and to do good for others. At times we may feel useless and that our life has no purpose. However, we need to know and be reminded that God created each of us for a unique purpose in this life and we should always be seeking to know and do God's will..

I myself was lifted up and inspired by this reminder in an interview I happened to catch on Real Presence Radio this past week. The interview was with Sherrie Weddell, and she reminded all listeners of something we do not hear enough about --- that from our parents and circumstances we receive or acquire certain natural talents and gifts. However, at baptism, we are each given one or more charisms or supernatural gifts from God that are not for our good but for the good of others – a unique fruit or gift for the nourishment and blessing of others that no one else has in the local community. It is important that with the help of others we discern what our charism gift is and put it to use. If everyone were to know and use their charism gift it would transform the world.

A few years ago we used a program by this Sherrie Weddell to help persons from our area parishes to discern and how to use their charisms. We could do that again, but now you can also do it individually on-line. Please check that out in the email update that I will be mailing out this week. --This just one of the things we can do to grow spiritually during this Lenten season.

Again, “The Lord is kind and merciful” – our psalm response today. One of the ways God shows his kindness and mercy is in calling us to repentance and renewal. This means that we can all be better than we are and God not only asks that of us but gives us the help to do so. This is true kindness. He would not be kind if he just overlooked our faults and failings and left us the way we are. The fact that he challenges us to change and be better than we are comes from his love as a caring parent and father to us. This is a call he expects us to respond to and not ignore. He tells us we all need to repent, that is, to work and to be better than we are.

This season of Lent keeps reminding us of our need to grow in holiness and goodness. It is easy to start off Lent with a great deal of enthusiasm as to what good works we are going to do, but as the weeks go by we get a little less enthusiastic. Sometimes, we are like little children taking a trip and shortly after we get started we’re asking “Are we there yet?”

Our liturgy today is telling us that we have about two thirds of the journey ahead of us before Easter is here. So don’t give up. Don’t be like the Israelites St. Paul tells us about in the second reading, who, even after seeing God at work in so many ways, lost their faith in God before they made it to the promised land. As Psalm 95 says --- “Today, listen to the voice of the Lord. Do not grow stubborn, as your fathers did in the wilderness, when at Meribah and Massah they challenged me and provoked me, although they had seen all of my works.”

With the help of the grace that we receive in this Mass, let us always be grateful for all God’s gifts and may we all do a better job of living up to what God wants of us. We must remember, though, at all times, that God knows our weaknesses, and whether God is comforting us, forgiving us, healing us, encouraging us or correcting us, “The Lord is kind and merciful,” and, as they say, “you can take that to the bank” or you can take that to the sacrament of reconciliation this weekend or some other time during this Lenten season.