

3rd Sunday Lent- Year "C"

March 19-20, 2022

It may bear fruit in the future.

Readings: Exodus 3: 1-8,13-15; 1 Corinthians 10: 1-6, 10-12; Luke 13:1-9

Waiting...watching...hoping. If you are waiting for a package, perhaps you have surmised that technology is a mixed blessing! Tracking numbers are equally a blessing and a curse! While we gain the ability to follow our progress, we can easily obsess. "Three days to get from Rancho Cordova, CA to Sacramento? It's only 25.2 miles! What's the hold-up?" It is a classic case of too much information!

This past Friday, I received a letter with a Vatican return address. Dated February 9, 2022, it began: "Very Reverend and Dear Father..." (was this a Vatican job offer? 😊) The Congregation received your letter of 10 February..." What? That makes absolutely no sense. I read it a second time- received my letter of 10 February **2021**- I had completely forgotten!

I had inquired about the new Vigil Mass for Epiphany. I suspect they also wrote to my Archbishop, "One of your priests is writing us concerning liturgical minutiae? What's with this guy?" 😊 It taught me valuable lessons about waiting, trusting, about patience and expectation. "It may bear fruit in the future." They actually gave me a very detailed response.

In our life of faith, it is also difficult to wait for answers. We may even be tempted to throw in the towel. We confess the same daily sins, seemingly unable to notice any progress. A family prays a daily rosary in hopes that Mom or Dad can find work. The young married couple struggling with fertility issues waits in hopeful expectation that they will be blessed with a baby. The pain of a grandmother seeing her grandchildren grow up without the benefit of Baptism is gut wrenching. She feels helpless.

Still, it is vital to trust in the Lord, not living in perpetual fear. God's mysterious providence remain ever beyond us. Trusting only ourselves, we will likely falter. The problems overwhelm us, and we desperately seek an answer right now. But guess what- it does not work that way!

In today's Gospel, the gardener has labored for three years, yet saw no fruit with the fig tree. Apple trees take close to five years to bear fruit; the tropical mangosteen tree in Thailand may take up to 20 years to bear fruit. It takes three–five years to cultivate a fig tree. Yet, in India, fig trees can produce between 200-300 fruits per year, well worth the wait.

“It may bear fruit in the future.” One of the signs of our times is that we so quickly lose patience with God. Today's Gospel is asking us to repent first, and only then seek an answer. We are still left to wonder what will happen to the tree? At the parable's conclusion, we are left with a tree that is good for nothing. The gardener offers to fertilize around it, but there is no indication that any new growth will actually occur.

This tree is a striking symbol of daily life, when our efforts towards good seem to be fruitless, and our spiritual life seems to be dead. What are we to do? The parable has neither a definitive ending, nor a neatly packaged resolution. Jesus is asking us to cling to the Lord, trusting that his promises will be made manifest. Can we live with the lack of resolution?

Jesus was looking for the fruit of repentance and it is this that must precede the fruits that he desires to see blossom in our lives. Our Gospel noted both the Galileans who died at the hands of a malicious Pontius Pilate, and the 18 Jerusalemites who died when a tower collapsed unexpectedly. But the fig tree will die expressly because of inactivity and unproductiveness. In the long run, this becomes the greater sin.

My take-away from the parable? He is giving us one last chance. Let us remain open to God's grace and blessings will eventually follow. There are reasons for hope, even amid the many challenges all around us. The Spring equinox occurs Sunday at 10:33 a.m. Winter is fading quickly. God will produce the needed fruit in us; let us always trust that His promises to us will be kept and let us do our part to prepare the soil, our very souls, to receive the seed of His Everlasting Love.