

The Third Sunday of Lent

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 55.1-9	Come to the water
Psalms 63.1-9	Longing for God
1 Corinthians 10.1-13	Lessons of Israel's history
Luke 13.1-9	Examples inviting repentance

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Examples inviting repentance

¹There were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?' ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them – do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?' ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

Parable of the barren fig tree

⁶Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷So he said to the gardener, "See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?" ⁸He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Comments and Questions

Is suffering a sign of God's displeasure? And conversely, is good fortune a sign of God's blessing? Jesus refers to a commonly held belief. Of course, we pray to be free of suffering, and we pray for blessings for ourselves and others. Do you feel God is blessing you through good fortune, or judging you when you suffer?

The danger of seeing blessings as a sign of God's favour is to go by our physical circumstances rather than by the state of our hearts.

Jesus says that repentance is necessary. Does he mean that everyone should be like this, or just certain people?

The owner of the vineyard has waited a certain amount of time to see if the fig tree will bear fruit, but now doesn't want to wait any longer. Is the parable about patience or impatience?

The tree deserved to be cut down, it was reprieved only because of the owner's mercy. Mercy is available for those who repent, not those who try to justify themselves.

In the parable we do not hear the ending. Why might this be? How would you end the parable?

Quotations

1

The Church has water and tears, the water of baptism and the tears of repentance.

St Ambrose, 339–97

2

Jesus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before him, does not aim first at outward works, 'sackcloth and ashes', fasting and mortification, but at the conversion of the heart, interior conversion. Without this, such penances remain sterile and false; however, interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance.²

Catechism of the Catholic Church. 1994. §1430

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3

There is an Oriental story of a Sultan who failed to waken one morning at the hour of prayer. The devil woke him up and told him to get up and pray. 'Who are you?' asked the Sultan. 'Never mind. My act is good, is it not?' replied the devil. 'No matter who does the good action, so long as it is good.' 'Yes, but I think you are Satan and you must have some bad motive,' the Sultan persisted. 'You are the tempter, that's your business, and I wish to know why you want me to get up and pray.' 'Well,' said the devil, 'if you had slept and forgotten your prayers, you would have been sorry for it afterwards, and penitent; but if you go on as now, and do not neglect a single prayer for ten years, you will be so satisfied with yourself that it will be worse for you then if you had missed one and repented of it. God loves your fault mixed with penitence more than your virtue seasoned with pride.'

More Quotes and Anecdotes / Tony Castle. 1986. A26

Related topics

For further study:

Repentance; sacrament of reconciliation; conversion; suffering; judgement.

Closing Prayer

Faithful God,
 you desire us to turn away
 from things that do not satisfy
 and find our fulfilment in you.
 Have patience with us,
 tend and nurture our faith
 and make us bear the fruit of true conversion
 to the praise of your grace and mercy.
 We ask this through Jesus Christ,
 who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,
 now and for ever.

Collect for Lent 3, Year C³

² Cf. Joel 2.12-13; Isaiah 1.16-17; Matthew 6.1-6,16-18.