

## Third Sunday of Lent - Year C – 03/23/2025

**Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15/ Psalm 103: 1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11/ 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12/ Luke 13:1-9**

Homily:

Today, we celebrate the Third Sunday of Lent and are halfway in our journey through the desert. Also, today marks the nineteen days of our Lenten journey in our walk by the desert, and like the Israelites, we are on a pilgrimage. We are on a pilgrimage where God leads the way. So, there is nothing to be afraid of! However, we can't cut corners or take detours. We need to follow the Way! Because if we want to be free, you and I need to enter the desert, and the only way out from this journey is to go into and through the desert, where God would lead us to the promised land.

My brothers and sisters! Lent is a journey where God wants all of us to repent and be saved. He wants no one to be excluded, which is why He is patient with us, as He was with the Israelites. During these 40 days of Lent, where we will be tested, we must commit to opening our hearts to God's graces and be willing to walk in the dryness of the desert so we can be transfigured as new creatures. There is no other option! As the Apostle Paul says in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians 6:1-2:

Working together, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

“In an acceptable time, I heard you,  
and on the day of salvation, I helped you.”

Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

The time of salvation is now, as Saint Paul said to us. In Lent, my brothers and sisters, we are called to be people that we are currently not! At the end of this Lent, I want to be someone I am currently not. I want to be someone new and transformed by God’s grace and mercy. The goal of Lent is to be like Jesus! But How can I expect to transform and change my life without changing my old ways of doing things?

In the first reading of the Book of Exodus, Moses is called to put his trust in the Lord for the mission it was assigned to him. At the same time, recounts the famous encounter of Moses with the Lord at the burning bush.

Moses grew up in Egypt, being raised by the Pharaoh’s daughter. But he had to leave Egypt at the age of 40 because he killed an Egyptian. He fled to the land of Midian, where he spent another 40 years hiding. During this time, he married and

had two children. Then, at the age of 80, God called him on the mission he was born to fulfill. For God nothing is impossible!

Moses was sent by God back to Egypt to lead the Israelite people out of slavery and to the Promised Land. Moses' encounter reveals much about God. Moses must approach the manifestation of God in the bush with the utmost reverence because God is holy, which means set apart. Moses was "afraid to look at God" because of his sinfulness, for sin separates us from God.

The Lord also shows his faithfulness to His people, even though they were not faithful to Him. He fulfills His promises to Abraham (which we heard about last week) by rescuing the Israelites from slavery and promising to bring them into the land promised to Abraham for his descendants. Furthermore, God reveals His unique name to Moses.

When Moses asks for His name, God says, "I am who am." In Hebrew, this is the word Yahweh. Here, God reveals that He is not one being among many, but He is existence itself. God is the very definition of being. He is the source of all things. He is the one and only true God. That reality was revealed to Moses in God calling Him to the mission of leading the Israelites out of slavery, and it remains just as true today, for God never changes.

In the First Letter of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul compares the Christian life with the experience of the Israelites at the time of the Exodus. The Israelites were set free from Egyptian slavery under the leadership of Moses and by the power of God. Their absolute freedom came when they crossed the Red Sea, and the Egyptians were overcome by the sea. St. Paul compares this with baptism.

At our baptism, we are set free from slavery to sin. But then, the journey continues. The Israelites may have been out of Egypt and free from slavery, but they still continuously struggled with the temptation to fall back into the practices they knew in Egypt that were contrary to God's laws.

Likewise, after our baptisms, we still struggle with the temptation to fall back into sin and need to seek God's forgiveness again and again. The time in the wilderness for the Israelites, therefore, foreshadows the life of the Christians from the time of baptism until death. During this time, we are nourished by "spiritual food" and "spiritual drink." For the Israelites, this was the manna and water that God provided for them. For us, this is the Eucharist. Our journey is headed toward the true Promised Land of Heaven. But will we be faithful along the way?

Today's Gospel (cf. Lk 13: 1-9) speaks to us about God's mercy and our conversion. Jesus recounts the parable of the barren fig tree. A man has planted

a fig tree in his vineyard, and with great confidence, he goes in search of its fruits each summer, but he finds none because that tree is barren. Disappointed for at least three years, the man considers cutting down the fig tree to plant a new one. So, he calls the gardener who is in the vineyard and tells him of his disappointment, ordering him to cut down the tree so as not to use up the ground without reason.

But the gardener asks the master to be patient and asks him for one more year, during which the gardener himself would take special and delicate care of the fig tree so as to stimulate its productivity. This is the parable. What does this parable symbolize? What do the characters in this parable symbolize?

The master represents God the Father, and the gardener is Jesus itself. The fig tree symbolizes an indifferent and insensitive humanity.

Jesus intercedes with the Father in favor of humanity — and he always does so — and implores him to wait and give it more time to bring forth the fruits of love and justice. The fig tree that the master in the parable wants to uproot represents an unfruitful or unproductive existence incapable of giving or doing good. It symbolizes one who lives for himself, is satisfied and calm, enjoys his comforts, and cannot turn his gaze and heart to those beside him who find themselves in conditions of suffering, poverty, and hardship.

This attitude of selfishness and spiritual barrenness is compared to the gardener's great love for the fig tree. He asks the master to wait. He is patient, knows how to wait, and devotes his time and work to it. He promises the master to take special care of that unfortunate tree.

This gardener's likeness manifests God's mercy, which leaves us time for conversion. We all need to convert ourselves and take a step forward while God's patience and mercy accompany us on this journey. Despite the desolation that marks our lives at times, God is patient and offers us the possibility to change and make progress on the path toward good. However, the delay requested and received in expectation of the tree bearing fruit also indicates the urgency of conversion.

The gardener tells the master: "Sir, leave it for this year also" (v. 8). The possibility of conversion is not unlimited; thus, it is necessary to seize it immediately; otherwise, it might be lost forever. So, in this Lent, we can consider: what do I have to do to draw nearer to the Lord, convert myself, and "cut out" those things that are not good? "No, no, I will wait until next Lent." But will I be alive next Lent? Today, let each one of us think: what must I do before this mercy of God who awaits me and who always forgives? What must I do?

My brothers and sisters, we can have great trust in God's mercy but without abusing it. We must not justify spiritual laziness but increase our commitment to respond promptly to this mercy with heartfelt sincerity.

Finally, let's sit back and think for a moment! What does God the Father want for us during this Lent? What is His invitation?

During this time of Lent, the Lord invites us to transfigure ourselves, to change. We must feel guided by this call and correct something in our lives, our way of thinking, behaving, and living our relationships with others. At the same time, we must imitate God's patience, who trusts in everyone's ability to "rise again" and continue the journey.

God is Father and does not extinguish the weak flame but instead accompanies and cares for those who are weak so that they may gain strength and bring their contribution of love to the community, society, and the whole world.

May the Virgin Mary help us to live these days of preparation and transformation on our way to Easter as a time of spiritual renewal and trusting openness to God's grace and mercy.