

### **Third Sunday of Lent C/2022**

The readings of this third Sunday of Lent talk about God's mercy and the necessity of repentance. They invite us to appreciate God's mercy and to repent of our sins.

The first reading describes the commission of Moses by God in order to liberate the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. It shows how at that time, as Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, he saw a burning bush that was not consuming.

It also shows how when he approached close to it, God called him from the bush and gave him the mission to lead the sons of Israel out of Egypt. The text ends up with the revelation of the name of God as the God of their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is sensitive to the suffering and pain of the oppressed people. There is also the idea that God cares for the wellbeing of his people. The last idea is related to the truth that in order to fulfill his designs God uses human beings as his instruments.

This text allows us to understand the point of today's Gospel as Jesus invites us to repentance. First of all, the gospel starts with a story that was told Jesus about some Galileans murdered by Pilate while they were sacrificing. Then, it talks about the reaction of Jesus revealing that those murdered were not greater sinners than all the Galileans.

After that, the Gospel gives Jesus' argument by referring to the accident of the Tower of Siloam where eighteen people lost their lives. As it was in the first case, the Gospel reiterates Jesus' invitation to repentance.

The Gospel ends with the parable of the fig tree. It tells in particular the story of a man who planned to destroy his tree that did not give fruits, but renounced his project thanks to the intervention of his gardener.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about the grace of a second chance. What do I mean with that? By way of introduction let me tell you an anecdote. In 1985 I was involved in car accident. At that time, as a young priest, I was teaching in our Junior Seminary. We had a lot of financial difficulties to maintaining a normal life for the Seminarians and to feed them. In spite of the good will of my colleagues and myself to give the best of ourselves for the formation of our future priests, it was difficult to maintain that institution without money.

One night, one of the Seminarians got sick and we had to drive him to the hospital. The only car we were using had some problems of the break that were not fixed. The sudden sickness of that Seminarian pushed us to drive it anyway in that state. On our way back, after having left the Seminarian in the hospital, we had a rollover. I felt very guilty as it was me who was driving.

However, in spite of that rollover the car came out without significant damage and my colleague, who is today the Bishop my Diocese of origin, and myself were sound and safe. That accident is just a small part of many tragedies happening in the world: think about September 11, 2001; Tsunami in 2004; Hurricane Katrina in 2005; the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. Many people died, but some others were lucky and survived.

Now, let us come back to the car accident: A couple of days later, I surprised a group of students talking about the accident by saying that we did not die because we were not sinners. When I went in my room, I taught a lot about what I heard. I said to myself, "I was spared, not because I am not a sinner, but because God is merciful. I had no merits to claim before my Lord. Maybe if I

died at that time, I would miss my heaven". I knew that the students were wrong to think so. Bad luck and misfortunes don't happen only to those who are sinners.

Consequently, if we are still alive, despite all the sins committed throughout our lives, it is because of God's patience. God gives an extra time to repent. He gives always a second chance. We have to take advantage of the second chance. We have to accept it, not as a good luck, but as a grace that he gives us now in order to repent. The question here is simple, but serious: Can we feel gratitude for the grace of second chance? What will you do to ensure that a mistake of the past is not repeated?

Jesus says it clearly: the Galileans killed by Pilate were not the greatest of sinners among their compatriots. Neither were the eighteen people on which the tower of Siloam fell, the worst of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Then comes a warning: "If you don't repent, you will all perish as they did".

In that perspective, what Jesus wants is to remind us that if bad things happen to others and not to us, it is not because we are saints or the best of all, but rather because God is merciful and patient with us.

In truth, God gives us a second chance so that we might do better than what we have done up to now. He gives us extra time so that we might change like the owner of the fig tree who delayed cutting down the tree in hope that it might bear fruit in the future.

What can help us understand the gravity of the words of Jesus is to look at our background and past. If we are sincere with ourselves, we can just say: "Thank you Jesus, because you give me a second chance". Then, we can confess in the sincerity of heart the truth of the Psalm 130 when it says, "If you Lord could count our sins, who would survive"!

That is why instead of being complacent, we have to appreciate God's patience toward us. After all we are not the best of men, but rather pardoned sinners. What a sinner has to do is not to boast about his merits, but to repent of his sins.

But what wonderful time to do it than during Lent! That is why in the life of the Church, Lent is a time of grace for the conversion of heart. But, the challenge is always there: will we listen to this appeal of God? Will we do something? Or will we let this time pass again without taking action as we have done up to now?

Moreover, if it is true that God is patient and merciful with us, then, we should not laugh at those who are in suffering or pain as though they are struck by God because of their sins. We should not look at those who have misfortune in their life as sinful people. On the contrary, we have to be humble and grateful to God for his patience and mercy with us, but at the same time make amend for our sins.

If we live this Lenten season with this profound spirit, it will be profitable to us. Let us, then, take advantage of this wonderful time of conversion and cleanse our lives through the sacrament of confession. Let us ask the Lord the courage of taking the present second chance seriously and reconcile with him and with our brothers and sisters. May God bless you all!

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



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