

3rd Sunday of Lent

Exod 3:1-8, 13-15

Ps 103:1-4, 6-8, 11

1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12

Lk 13:1-9

We have some stories in our Gospel reading today that only appear in the Gospel according to Luke. The story of the Galileans that were massacred by Pilate, and the story of the eighteen people that died when the tower collapsed on them. Why would these stories be included in the Gospel reading for the third Sunday of Lent? I believe that these two stories are placed here at this point in Lent as a reality check for us. We are almost to the halfway point of Lent. How are we doing on our Lenten journey? Are we taking it seriously? Or have we not really done everything yet?

In the time of Jesus it was believed that if someone sinned then God would allow bad things to happen to the sinner. Jesus is pointing out that this is not the case. The people were not being punished because of their sins. This is actually another example of always being prepared. We do not know when the last day of our life will occur. It could come at any moment, so we always need to be prepared. The Galileans that were killed, and the 18 people that died in the accident most likely got up that morning like it was just going to be another day. They went to the synagogue to pray, or to work, and then disaster happened. They never made it home. Were they prepared? Jesus is warning His disciples how important it is to repent now and turn to the Lord. Don't put it off because we don't know when we will die.

Jesus gives the example of the fig tree. In the Old Testament the fig tree symbolized Israel. The fig tree is productive. It can produce fruit several times a year. It is a desirable tree in the Holy Land. In His parable Jesus points out that the owner has been looking for fruit from this fig tree for three years now, but it has not produced any. How long was Jesus' public ministry? It was three years long. So we can see in this parable that Jesus had been looking for fruit from His ministry to the Israelites for three years but had found nothing. *"So cut it down!"* God's word did not have any effect on the religious leaders. They had not repented. Again, it's another warning to not be unprepared. The time is now to allow God's word to make a difference in our lives, and to turn whole heartedly to the Lord.

We see a glimpse of why we need to be prepared in the first reading. Moses approaches the burning bush that is not consumed by fire. As Moses approaches it God tells him not to come any closer. God tells Moses that he is on holy ground. He needs to take off his sandals. Moses realizes that he is in the presence of the Holy One, and he falls prostrate before God.

This is what we have to be prepared for. As God's children we are called by Him. As we journey through life we have to be prepared for this face to face encounter. We will one day be in the presence of the Holy One. God is all holy and all pure. Yet, how can we be in the presence of the Holy One if we never prepare for it? Do we take it for granted that God will not care about the status of our souls? Of course He will. The Lord is kind and merciful, as the responsorial psalm states, slow to anger and abounding in kindness. However, we should never forget that God is all holy and pure. To be in His presence is to stand on holy ground. We are expected to be pure too. This takes preparation. We need to work with God's grace in order to be prepared. So, at this midway point of Lent the Church wisely gives us these readings so that we can do a self-check on our Lenten progress. Have we used these first three weeks of Lent wisely? If we haven't really done anything yet, then please don't wait. Please don't be caught off guard like the Galileans or the 18 people mentioned in our Gospel reading. Jesus is looking for the fruit of His work being produced in our lives. Now is the time! Now is the day of salvation!