

Homily 3rd Sunday of Lent, March 20, 2022

Our First reading today begins with Moses tending a flock. He is in a desert, a field, and he is in a mountain area. All of these resonate with us during this Lenten Season.

A desert is not necessarily a vast area of sand dunes with nothing else to show for it. The Desert is also a wilderness. And that word ‘wilderness’ suggests a place that is ‘wild.’ It is not tame. Mountains and fields and deserts are not tame areas.

And they also are not areas crowded with people. When away from others, often our senses then pick up sights and sounds we have not heard, or not noticed. Our senses might even be on a higher alert. We are searching and checking our surroundings.

So, Moses is somewhat alone – and on his own - for periods of time each day. It is in this set-apart situation that he meets God. God calls Moses, gives him a purpose and mission, and reveals Himself - makes Himself known to Moses.

And it is in the set-apart places we still today find we can hear God. Lent is – in the midst of life – our time of being set apart that we might be more focused on God – who reveals Himself and gives us mission and purpose.

I pray our Lent is being that kind of a time for us.

==_==_==_==

Our other readings are about God being kind and merciful. If the readings also seem to be warnings, it is also because God is kind enough to point out our need for correction and growth. That is the repeated message in the gospel passage today.

Whether it is suffering due to the actions of human individuals (in this case Pilate), or deaths that occurred more to natural disaster (like the tower falling on people); our Lord teaches that the greater tragedy is to not take the time given to repent.

And that is His message in the parable he told. An extremely patient plantation owner and gardener who will give a fig tree one more extra year, with extra care given it, before it is given up on. The lesson is for all listeners to consider ourselves

the fig tree who are given many chances by the God of kindness and mercy. Do we use the chances given to come back to God and produce much good fruit?

God is kind and merciful. God does not just give us time, He tends to us, cares for us, helps us.

==_==_==_==

About that care, one author [Bishop Mueggenborg] shared some thoughts on the gardener fertilizing the tree. He pointed out that a more precise translation of the word here is ‘manure.’ This is how this author put it:

“We should not whitewash it by calling it ‘fertilizer!’

“Manure has a purpose which is to stimulate growth so as to produce the good fruit of repentance. Sometimes God has to put manure in our lives to wake us up to our need to repent. The reality is that manure happens. It’s not a sign of God’s punishment but of God’s mercy calling us to greater repentance...When things go well, we rarely feel our need to turn towards God. More often than not, it’s when tragedy strikes in our lives or in the lives of others that we turn to the Lord.

“We see an example of this search for meaning - in the midst of tragedy happening - when the crowd posed the question to Jesus about the death of Galileans by Pilate. So often when we find ourselves dealing with difficult or painful situations, we can experience self-pity and say, “Why me?” However, with an attitude of right faith, we can also find ourselves in prayer asking that same question “Why me?” not out of self-pity but out of a sincere desire to know how our lives are meant to be changed by God’s grace and our spiritual growth stimulated by that manure (fertilizer for faith).

“Lent is a good time to look at some of the manure that is been dumped around each of our lives and to bring it before God so the Lord can till the soil of our hearts and allow it to give growth to deeper faith rather than remain on the surface and be a cause of self-pity.”

==_==_==_==

To repeat, my brothers and sisters - we are encouraged by our Lord today to see the world with eyes that recognize God giving us time and warnings - to repent,

to turn back, and to love. To use the time we have as the gift it is, that we can be ready.