

3rdrd Sunday of Lent: March 7, 2010



Theme: Bear Fruit or you may wither and die.

Reading I: Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15 Author: followers of Moses Date: ~ 1500 BCE

Background: Exodus: Our God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (See attached “Genealogy of Man”.) He is a God who intervenes powerfully in human history when he sees the affliction of his people to deliver them from the slavery of sin into the land “flowing with milk and honey”. God calls Moses and sends him to lead his people out of Egypt through the wilderness and bringing them into the Promised Land. Then finally he sends his Son, offering his people one last chance to repent and accept his salvation (gospel).

Theme: I AM sent you and will rescue you .

Question: o Do we believe we owe the existence of all things to God?

Reading II: Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12, Author: Paul Date: ~ 55 AD

Background: The situation confronting Paul at Corinth (on his 3rd Missionary trip) is that the Christians are supposing that the sacraments automatically confer the fullness of salvation here and now. Paul then has to stress the “not yet” aspect of the sacraments. They seem to want the fullness of salvation sooner than later.

Theme God has warned us to not desire evil things or have a false sense of security.

Question: o When do we have a false sense of security?

Gospel: Luke: 13: 1-9 Author – Luke, the Physician Date: ~ 80-85 AD

Background: Jesus here refers to two recent disasters, otherwise unknown to historians. One was the outrage of a tyrant, the other an accident involving construction workers in Siloam. From both events he draws a warning for Israel. Unless the nation repents, it too will perish. For Jesus, repentance means accepting his message of God's kingdom. The parable of the fig tree reinforces the challenge to repent. This provides a link with the second reading: “Let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” Neither the old Israel nor the new dare presume upon a false sense of security.

Theme: You must bear future fruit, otherwise be cut down.

Questions: O Who in the parable is the: Fig tree, Owner, Land, Gardener?

O What do the Gardeners want to do when the owner want to chop down the tree?

O When is the time for mercy? When is the time for judgement?

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Reading I: [Ex 3:1-8a, 13-15](#)

Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro,
the priest of Midian.

Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb,
the mountain of God.

There an angel of the LORD appeared to Moses in fire
flaming out of a bush.

As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush,
though on fire, was not consumed.

So Moses decided,

“I must go over to look at this remarkable sight,
and see why the bush is not burned.”

When the LORD saw him coming over to look at it more closely,
God called out to him from the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

He answered, “Here I am.”

God said, “Come no nearer!

Remove the sandals from your feet,
for the place where you stand is holy ground.

I am the God of your fathers, “ he continued,
“the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.”

Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

But the LORD said,

“I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt
and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers,
so I know well what they are suffering.

Therefore I have come down to rescue them

from the hands of the Egyptians

and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land,
a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Moses said to God, “But when I go to the Israelites
and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’
if they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what am I to tell them?”

God replied, “I am who am.”

Then he added, “This is what you shall tell the Israelites:

I AM sent me to you.”

God spoke further to Moses, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites:

The LORD, the God of your fathers,

the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob,

has sent me to you.

“This is my name forever;

thus am I to be remembered through all generations.”

Reading II: [1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12](#)

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,

that our ancestors were all under the cloud
and all passed through the sea,
and all of them were baptized into Moses
in the cloud and in the sea.

All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink,
for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them,
and the rock was the Christ.
Yet God was not pleased with most of them,
for they were struck down in the desert.

These things happened as examples for us,
so that we might not desire evil things, as they did.
Do not grumble as some of them did,
and suffered death by the destroyer.
These things happened to them as an example,
and they have been written down as a warning to us,
upon whom the end of the ages has come.
Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall.

Gospel: [Lk 13:1-9](#)

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans
whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices.

Jesus said to them in reply,

“Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way
they were greater sinners than all other Galileans?

By no means!

But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!

Or those eighteen people who were killed
when the tower at Siloam fell on them—

do you think they were more guilty
than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem?

By no means!

But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!”

And he told them this parable:

“There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard,
and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none,

he said to the gardener,

‘For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree
but have found none.

So cut it down.

Why should it exhaust the soil?’

He said to him in reply, ‘Sir, leave it for this year also,
and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it;

it may bear fruit in the future.

If not you can cut it down.

3rd Sunday of Lent :

March 7, 2010

Fr. John Kavanaugh

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Holy Ground of Being “I AM sent me to you.”

Today’s reading from Exodus was a favorite of my favorite philosopher, St. Thomas Aquinas. The story reads simply enough, but for Aquinas the implications were momentous.

Moses is tending the flocks. He sees a burning bush which is not consumed, and he hears his name called out from the blaze. When Moses responds, “Here I am,” he is warned to “come no nearer.” The spot on which he stands is holy ground. He encounters the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who has come to rescue his people. Yet Moses is hesitant: “If they ask me ‘what is his name?’ what am I to tell them?” God says, “I am who am. This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you. This is my name forever. This is my title for generations.” This section of Exodus begins an account of the relationship between God and the Israelites. Their God will be a God of free covenant, a God who personally intervenes to save them. “I AM will always be with them.”

True, there were other formulations that referred to God, for example: “The Most High,” “The One Who Sees,” “The Eternal One.” And even this particular expression has been given various interpretations, ranging from “I will be who I will be” to “I will be what I was.”

But Aquinas saw in the burning bush a revelation of the deepest mystery of a God who could never adequately and accurately be named or conceptualized. There is no other way to talk about who and what God is other than to say that God is existence itself. Am-ness. God is the holy ground of being. At the bottom of the universe is not some mindless evolutionary process. What moves everything, from stars to human hearts, is personal existence.

If you just think about it, the fact that there is anything at all is the most wondrous thing. Existence is the giver and gift of all gifts. Nothing could be known, if there were nothing to know. Nothing could be loved if there were nothing to love. There could be no fulfillment, no desire, no truth, if there were no “is.”

Thus, in Aquinas’s own great exodus—his theological/philosophical work called the *Summa Theologica*—after offering his 5 ways to God, he centers on existence itself as the word that can most adequately be applied to God. Existence is the primary value, the fundamental good, one with the very being of God. And since all other beings have their own existence by gift of God, our existence is our primary value and goodness. “Everything that exists is, as such, good, and has God as its cause.” If we exist, and we cannot give existence to ourselves, we must have been willed, loved into existence.

God not only creates and sustains every existing being; God also creates each kind of being there is. Every being participates in a hierarchy of goodness and intrinsic value. Each species is good, not only because it exists in the first place, but also because of what it is. Each species brings its own kind of goodness into the world; and each species lost would be a loss of goodness. All creation, in all its myriad forms, is existentially good.

Aquinas valued personal reality as the “most perfect grade of existence” because it images the “I am-ness” of God: life that knows itself and gives itself to the other. This is not some glib speciesism, which degrades other kinds of life. It is just an acknowledgment that freedom, intelligence, and love introduce a new splendor of intrinsic goodness and value into the world which, without persons, would be bereft of such beauty.

But the existence of personal creatures like human beings also introduces a host of problems to the world. Our peculiar goodness as humans is not only a function of the fact that we exist and that we exist as a special kind. We also present a moral goodness to the world, since we, with our capacities for intelligence and freedom, are able to know and possess ourselves and consequently choose to become the kind of persons we become.

Evil, for Aquinas, has no reality in itself. It occurs only as a parasite. Evil appears only because good things exist. Physical evil is a deficiency or lack in the physical reality of various kinds of beings. Thus, a horse might not be good as a horse because it is lame. A fig tree is physically evil to the extent that it does not bear fruit. Moral evil, however, is a deficiency or lack in the kind of human being you or I have freely chosen to be. It is a negation of our truth. It is a rejection of our goodness. It is a radical lie about existence.

All too speculative, perhaps. But might not these philosophical ruminations unlock the mysteries with which Lent ends? That bright vigil will recall for us the holy ground of being: In God’s own image, male and female, God created us. And like the great cosmic march of species, we, humankind, were pronounced good by the one who gave us the gift of being. Seduced by the great deceiver, the liar of liars, we seem to have rejected it all. But by the bountiful grace of “I am with you,” even the fault itself became a happy one.

The Barren Fig Tree

While the preceding discussion concerned the people, this one unmistakably concerns the leaders (= fig tree) who are stealing life from the people (= the vineyard; see Isa 5:7).

Later in this Gospel (Luke 20:19) the leadership (scribes and chief priests) clearly understands that vineyard parables are directed to them and told about them. Thus this present parable unmistakably states that current leadership within the nation is fruitless and should be rooted out.

The details of this parable reflect its Mediterranean cultural context perfectly. The vineyard owner obviously lives in the city and rents his vineyard to a tenant farmer who does the digging, the planting, etc. He “had the tree planted.”

The Palestinian fig tree bears fruit ten months of the year, and so one can reasonably expect to find fruit at almost any time. The time sequence regarding fig trees is this: first, the tree would have three years to grow after planting. The fruit of the next three years is considered forbidden (see Lev 19:23). The fruit of the seventh year is considered clean and ought to be offered to the Lord (Lev 19:24).

The owner in this parable has come seeking fruit for three years, hence it is nine years since planting, and the situation begins to look hopeless. He rightly urges that it be rooted out, but the gardener urges “mercy,” give the tree yet another chance.

Keep in mind that the parable is not about trees but about the nation’s leadership. The gardener’s proposed remedy for the tree’s problems reflects Jesus’ mastery of “insult humor.”

Throughout the Gospels Jesus, the authentic Mediterranean native, resorts to insults on a regular basis, and they are always gems. The gardener might have proposed new soil for the tree, or increased watering.

Instead he proposed spreading manure on it. Jesus’ original peasant audience undoubtedly roared with laughter. This is just what those #)%!@* leaders need!

Moreover, in Aramaic there is a wordplay between “dig it out” and “let it alone” (also the word for forgiveness), which makes the parable and its point very easy to remember. Judgment (dig it out)? No, mercy and forgiveness (let it alone)!

The tree cannot lift itself by its roots. They (the leaders) need the intervention of an outsider, the gardener, God himself!

Dedicated reformers are often so focused on the evils to be exterminated that they neglect the need for personal reform as well. This is as true of all as it is of leaders.

This is the point Luke’s Jesus makes in today’s masterful cluster of readings. The passage is beautifully appropriate to Lent. It needs no further comment.

It is my Father's glory, Christ said, that you should bear abundant fruit and become my disciples. But even when we have glorified the Father by bearing much fruit and becoming Christ's disciples, we still have no right to claim the credit for it as though the work were ours alone.

The grace to carry out the work had first to come to us from God, and so the glory is his, not ours.

That is why Christ is recorded in another place as saying: *Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works*—and here, lest they be tempted to attribute those good works to themselves, he immediately added: *and may give the glory for them to your heavenly Father.*

This, then, is the Father's glory, that we should bear abundant fruit and become Christ's disciples, since it is only through God's mercy in the first place that we can become the disciples of Christ. *We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the performance of good works.*

As the Father has loved me, Jesus says, so I have loved you. Abide in my love. There we have the source of every good work of ours. How do they come to be ours? Only because faith is active in love. And how could we ever love, unless we ourselves were loved first?

In his first letter John the evangelist made this quite clear. *Let us love God, he wrote, because he first loved us.* The Father does indeed love us, but he does so in his Son; we glorify the Father by bearing fruit as branches of the vine which is his son and becoming his disciples.

Abide in my love, he says to us. How may we do that? In the words that follow you have your answer. If you observe what I command you, then you will truly abide in my love.

But is it love that makes us keep the Lord's commandments, or is it the keeping of them that makes us love him? There can be no doubt that love comes first.

Anyone devoid of love will lack all incentive to keep the commandments. When, therefore, Christ says to us: *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love,* he is telling us that the observance of the commandments is not the source but rather the gauge and touchstone of our love.

It is as though he said to us: Do not suppose you are abiding in my love if you are not keeping my commandments, for it is by observing them that you will abide in my love. That is to say, your observance of my commandments is the proof, the outward manifestation, of the fact that you abide in my love.

Let no one, then, who neglects to keep the divine commandments deceive himself by protesting his love for God. It is only to the extent to which we keep the Lord's commandments that we abide in his love; insofar as we fail to keep them we fail to love.

Yet even when we do keep God's commandments, it is not something we do in order to make God love us, for unless he loved us first we should not be able to keep them. It is the gift of his grace, a grace which is accessible to the humble of heart, but beyond the reach of the proud.

Augustine (354-430) was born at Thagaste in Africa and received a Christian education, although he was not baptized until 387. In 391 he was ordained priest and in 395 he became coadjutor bishop to Valerius of Hippo, whom he succeeded in 396. Augustine's theology was formulated in the course of his struggle with three heresies: Manicheism, Donatism, and Pelagianism. His writings are voluminous and his influence on subsequent theology immense. He molded the thought of the Middle Ages down to the thirteenth century. Yet he was above all a pastor and a great spiritual writer

REFLECTION

We have in our First Reading for this liturgy an account of God's first of many conversations with Moses. God speaks to Moses from a burning bush which does not consume the bush. Many experts have commented on the symbolism of that. Moses is asked to take off his shoes as he approaches the holiness of God. The Voice tells Moses that God has a good idea. Israel is in slavery over in Egypt and Moses is to go and manage their release.

The Voice identifies Itself as the God of Moses' religious tradition. God is the same God Who called Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So God has presented proper credentials and then presents Moses with his mission. He is to go and talk to the powerful leader of Egypt. Moses responds stating a rather ironical, "Who am I to do such a thing?" So he asks God about what credentials can he present for this conversation with Pharo. God says that Moses should say that I Am Who Am sent you. So we have the naming of partners. I Who Am I is being missioned by I am Who. Moses has a second mission as well and that is to inform the people of Israel that the God of their tradition has released them from slavery and desires that this be a cause for their remembering the "Who Am" Who will always be with them.

Recently in Central America, emails were being sent around that the United States, for future military advantages, had caused the earthquakes in Haiti. A few years ago various Christian preachers were saying that the devastating hurricane which caused so much hardship and loss of life in New Orleans was a divine punishment for homosexuality. This is not a recent interpretation of events.

In today's Gospel two historic events, at least historic to the readers of Luke's Gospel, are presented as a backdrop for the use of a parable by Jesus. The people tell Jesus about some who were killed by a falling tower and that others suffered by Pilate's mixing blood with their sacrifices. Jesus reminds them that physical suffering is not caused by sin necessarily, which was the common religious thought at the time. Jesus bends their news back on them. Those others suffered and some died, but those in front of Jesus will certainly suffer unless they repent. To show them that they have time to experience the compassion of God, He relates a picturesque parable.

God had been patient with Israel and brought them slowly to be the fruitful people of the Covenant by bringing them out of slavery and into a fruitful land.

There is a people who have withered as mature produce of God's fidelity. Jesus will minister that love in His incarnate presence within Israel. His time will be their time for repenting from unfruitful, un-incarnate lives themselves.

The parable ends with their being cut away, because of their lack of personal response to Jesus' mission, teaching and His very life. Jesus is the grounds keeper and His time is ours as well. His three years is our whole life's time.

We have these days of Lent for our repenting from the non-life things. We are preparing to renew our own baptisms as well as preparing as a community to welcome into our communities those preparing for entrance during these days as well.

We are invited to repent from those attitudes which are not resulting in blessings, in enlivening, in deepening those around us. I would hope that we in the community would not be a disappointment to those entering our numbers during the Easter Vigil. I ponder of what I would be ashamed at their discovering about me at the liturgy, at my office, at home.

Genealogy of Man

Adam

130 years old when Seth born. Lived ~ 930 years. Adam & Eve also had Cain & Abel

Seth

Enosh

Canain

Mahalelel

Jared

Enoch

Methuselah

Lamech

Noah

600 when floods came. Stayed in Arc 1 year. Lived ~950 years. Noah had 3 sons: Shem, Ham & Japheth

Shem

Abram

Born ~ 2166 BC. Leaves Egypt for Canaan (Israel). Married Sarai.

Abram had another son by Hagar - Sarai's maidservant- named Ishmael. Ishmael is Father of Arabs.

Isaac

Jacob

12 sons: Including Judah & Benjamin (12 tribes of Israel)

The 12 tribes of Jacob join Moses in exodus from Egypt 430 years after Jacob went to Egypt

I

Moses

Moses' Father is Levi & brother is Aaron. 1500 AD

WOW Word of the Day

<p>Fruit</p> <p>Jesus' parable of the fig tree, owner, gardener</p>	<p>March 7</p>
<p>Transfiguration</p> <p>Lent is a time of change & conversion</p>	<p>Feb. 28</p>
<p>Temptation</p> <p>Get your food and strength from God and resist temptation .</p>	<p>Feb. 21</p>
<p>Attitude</p> <p>Trust in God leads to blessings. Trust in humans alone leads to woe.</p>	<p>Feb. 14</p>
<p>Rise:</p> <p>Get in, get out and raise men to faith</p>	<p>Feb. 7</p>
<p>Faith:</p> <p>God performs miracles for those who have faith and love.</p>	<p>Jan. 31</p>
<p>Word made Flesh:</p> <p>Jesus reads scripture in the temple that He is the Son of Man</p>	<p>Jan. 24</p>
	<p>Jan. 17</p>
	<p>Jan. 10</p>
	<p>Jan. 3</p>