

## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

March 20, 2022 C

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *Liberating God, thank you for gathering us together as your people to share life and your Word. Just as you revealed yourself to Moses, reveal yourself to us as we listen to your Word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Response to last week's Word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

**Facilitator reads Focus statement:** Lent is a time for conversion, a turning toward God and away from anything that separates us from him. Today, we hear the story of Moses turning toward a burning bush and finding the living and saving God. In the second reading and the Gospel, there is a call to repentance, a call to turn towards God.

*Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

### FIRST READING: Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15

When God appears to Moses in the burning bush, Moses is a fugitive, having murdered a man in Egypt some years previously. Now he is married and is a shepherd of his father-in-law's flock. God identifies himself as the God of Moses' ancestors: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God also tells Moses that he has heard the cry of his suffering people in Egypt and that he intends to free them. (Unfortunately omitted from today's passage is Moses' actual call: "Come now! I will send you..." [v.10] and God's reassurance to Moses that he will be with him during his mission [v.12]). Moses asks God his name. God answers: "I Am, Who Am"—a name that defies accurate definition. A possible translation is: *I am One who will be with you and for you no matter what.*

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 103

This psalm of thanksgiving recounts God's goodness to Moses and the Israelites, and God's desire to deliver the oppressed.

### SECOND READING: 1Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

Paul warns the Corinthians (and us) not to equate election (being chosen) with salvation. Their ancestors received many blessings from God, yet most did not follow his ways. Then Paul, in a daring

and remarkable act of creative interpretation, reads back into Israel's history the presence of Christ, the Rock, and sees in the waters of the Red Sea and the desert manna prefigurements of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. While traveling through the desert, the Israelites received many spiritual blessings (sacraments in a way) and yet they fell away from God. Paul reminds the Corinthians that despite the salvation they have received through the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, *they must work at continuous conversion lest they perish* like their ancestors. Failure to heed God's call to ongoing conversion will bring dire consequences.

### PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:

#### Luke 13:1-9

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

## GOSPEL: Luke 13:1-9

Today's Gospel makes reference to two disasters which the people ask Jesus to comment on. They seem to believe that bad things have befallen the victims because they are sinners. The absence of bad things in the questioners' lives implies that they are righteous and not in need of repentance.

Jesus quickly sets his questioners straight on this issue: "Bad things didn't happen to the victims in either incident because they were unrighteous or bad people. And the absence of bad things in your lives does not mean that you are not in need of repentance. Indeed you are." Jesus admonishes them: "*You are all in need of repentance and if you do not repent, you will perish.*" The unrepentant will suffer a fate worse than the victims of the disaster. Jesus uses the two terrible events as a metaphor for the catastrophic ending that awaits those who refuse to repent. Jesus is saying that the big tragedy in life is not being abused or killed accidentally. Rather, true tragedy rests in the hearts of each of us and our choice to reject God's call to repentance and change of heart.

Jesus exhorts his audience (and us) to not be preoccupied with why bad things happen to people, but rather to be concerned about the condition of their own soul. It is indeed tragic when a person is killed, but for Jesus, there is no tragedy worse than a mind and heart closed to God. *No one* can afford to be spiritually complacent.

In Jesus' parable of the *Fig Tree*, sometimes called "*The Parable of the Second Chance*," the owner, noticing that his fig tree is not bearing any fruit, wants to cut it down. The vinedresser asks that it be given one more chance: "*Sir, leave it for another year.*" The fig tree represents Israel; the Vinedresser represents God. Just as the gardener is patient with the fig tree, so is God patient with sinners. In his youth, Moses kills a man but God does not write him off. God sees immense potential in this former murderer and calls him to carry out a great mission. Church history is full of examples of barren fig trees that, in time, became fruitful, e.g., Paul, Augustine, and Thomas Merton. However, the parable also makes it clear that time may run out on the unrepentant. If people refuse chance after chance to turn their lives around, God will not quit on them, but they will, by deliberate choice, shut themselves out

of God's Kingdom. This parable calls us to be fruitful trees in God's vineyard.

## FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. Moses' burning bush experience dramatically changed the course of his life. Have you had a 'burning bush' event or an experience of God's closeness that changed the course of your life? If so, how was that experience?
3. The second reading is a call to continuous conversion. In the Gospel, there is an urgent call to conversion. Name examples of what continuous conversion may involve. What helps you from falling into the trap of "spiritual smugness?"
4. "He came looking for fruit but found none." What kind of fruit do you think Jesus expects disciples to bear? Share one example of "fruit" that you seek to bear daily.
5. The Gospel is a clear call to repentance "lest we perish". What can help you to see what conversion may still be needed in your life?
6. What is the one thing Jesus is saying to us in this Sunday's Gospel about how a disciple should speak or act?

**JOURNALING:** *Having listened to God's word and listened to others reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

## PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions:

*Jesus, help me to see how I can be a fruit-bearing Christian this week. Help me to see where conversion is needed in my life.*

## **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: Seek to be attentive to the inbreakings of God in your life. Be aware of how you could be a "fruit-bearing" Catholic this week.

## **CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

**Facilitator:** What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray? Suggestion: Pray especially for the grace of true contrition and repentance for yourself and for all who are away from God and Church. Pray for all who are preparing for Baptism and entry into our church.

## **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*I am grateful that you are kind and merciful, dear Lord. Too often, I am more aware of my sins than my goodness. Help me to see all people the way that you see us. As you led your people out of slavery, lead me out of my slavery to sin. Through Jesus, your kindness and mercy have been given flesh. Open my arms to receive it and give thanks by being kind and merciful to all, one person at a time.*