

## Weekend Readings & Reflections

### March 19-20, 2022 – Third Sunday of Lent

**Reflection:** *In the Church, we are made children of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God who makes known His name and His ways to Moses in today’s First Reading. Mindful of His covenant with Abraham (see Exodus 2:24), God came down to rescue His people from the slave drivers of Egypt. Faithful to that same covenant (see Luke 1:54–55, 72–73), He sent Jesus to redeem all lives from destruction, as today’s Psalm tells us. Paul says in today’s Epistle that God’s saving deeds in the Exodus were written down for the Church, intended as a prelude and foreshadowing of our own Baptism by water, our liberation from sin, our feeding with spiritual food and drink. Yet the events of the Exodus were also given as a “warning”—that being children of Abraham is no guarantee that we will reach the promised land of our salvation. At any moment, Jesus warns in today’s Gospel, we could perish, not as God’s punishment for being “greater sinners” but because, like the Israelites in the wilderness, we stumble into evil desires, fall into grumbling, forget all His benefits. Jesus calls us today to “repentance”—not a one-time change of heart, but an ongoing, daily transformation of our lives. We’re called to live the life we sing about in today’s Psalm, blessing His holy name, giving thanks for His kindness and mercy. The fig tree in His parable is a familiar Old Testament symbol for Israel (see Jeremiah 8:3; 24:1–10). As the fig tree is given one last season to produce fruit before it is cut down, so too Jesus is giving Israel one final opportunity to bear good fruits as evidence of its repentance (see Luke 3:8). Lent should be for us like the season of reprieve given to the fig tree, a grace period in which we let “the gardener,” Christ, cultivate our hearts, uprooting what chokes the divine life in us, strengthening us to bear fruits that will last into eternity.*

### OPENING PRAYER

**Leader:** Welcome our discussion on the Third Sunday of Lent. Let’s begin by praying together:

**All:** Dear Lord, you are always waiting with open arms to welcome us back when we fall away from you. Give us the grace to be like Peter, who ran to you to seek reconciliation. Help pick us up as often as we fall, and assist us in times of temptation and weakness. Be with us as you were with your disciples, and make us ready to accept the overabundance of your gifts, like the overabundance of fish that you blessed the fishing apostles with. Help us to remain always near you. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Leader:** *In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus challenges Peter to love him in a total, unconditional way. But before he does this, Jesus shows his overwhelming love for Peter and the other apostles. He gives his fishing disciples such a massive catch that their nets could barely hold it all. This is a wonderful example of how God desires to bless us more than we could ever imagine. As we get started today, let’s think about some of the ways God has given you unexpected gifts or blessings this week. Reflect on what God is calling you to today. Are you open to God’s calling? Or am I hesitant as Peter was? Let’s watch this video on FORMED together as we get started.*

(Play the video on [FORMED.org](https://www.formed.org) - [Opening the Word – Third Sunday in Lent \(Year C\)](#))

### FIRST READING ~ Exodus 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.”

*In our first reading God meets Moses at the mountain of God; while Moses was simply carrying out his duties tending the flock, something caught his attention and he investigated.*

- *How attentive are you to God communicating in your everyday life?*

*God chooses to reveal the Divine Name to Moses; “I AM WHO I AM.” It is so sacred to Judaism that they use initials ‘YHWH’.*

- *What does it mean when someone shares their name with you? How have you encountered God so far during Lent?*

*When we listen to God do we take on the role of passive spectator OR actively engage with God as a change agent? Moses shared with God that he felt too weak and unable to talk properly. God provides answers to all Moses’ issues...*

- *How has God asked something of you lately? Have you freely explained your concerns to God and who might you ask to help you be obedient to fulfilling God’s will?*

## **SECOND READING** ~ 1 Corinthians 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.

*The Corinthian community was becoming comfortable. They assumed that receiving Baptism and celebrating Eucharist was all one needed to be saved. St Paul reminds them of the dangers of presuming salvation. Our Hebrew ancestors did this and they “were struck down in the desert”. This is a warning; we need to continually try to cooperate with God.*

- *Are you feeling comfortable in your faith? What lifestyle choice or action could you make to express a more committed following of Jesus?*

## GOSPEL ~ Luke 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.’”

*The theme of God's judgment enters Lent in this passage of Luke. Pilate had killed religious revolutionaries from Galilee while they were offering sacrifices to God in the temple. That event was compared to a tower falling over near the Temple (pool of Siloam) killing 18 people. They asked Jesus if these people were sinners, and if God was punishing them. Jesus provides a shocking answer. We are all going to die and receive judgment before God. It is urgent and your first concern to be found 'ready'.*

- Are you ready to die? Why not?

*The fig tree, the only tree mentioned in the garden of Eden, is at the same time a symbol of the promised Land, God's people, & the blessing of God.*

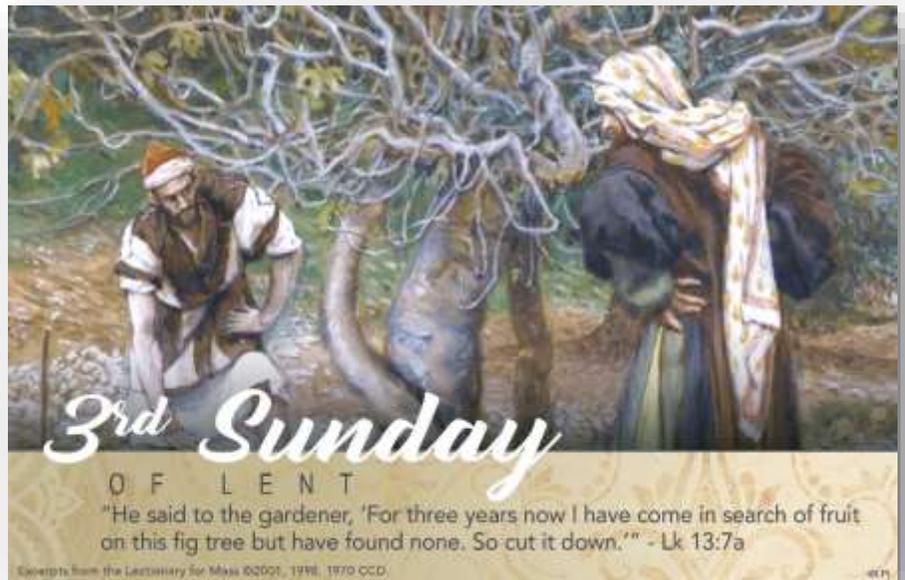
- In the parable, can you see yourself as the fig tree? Who do you think the gardener is?

*It took about 3 years for a fig to fruit. By God's mercy it is given more time but it is still under judgment.*

- Consider God's call on each of us as disciples. What is it like to know God is merciful? How is God fertilizing and cultivating you? What fruit are we asked to produce?

*In ancient times people thought God was vengeful & punishing. Jesus says God is NOT this way. He shares the importance of people moving away from sin and destructive patterns of guilt and blame. Repent means literally 'to turn your life around'.*

- What would you like to turn 'from' and 'toward'?



## MEDITATION

Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree illustrates his warning about the consequences of allowing sin and corruption to take root in our hearts and minds. Fig trees were a common and important source of food for the people of Palestine. A fig tree normally

matured within three years, producing plentiful fruit. If it failed, it was cut down to make room for healthier trees. A decaying fig tree and its bad fruit came to symbolize for the Jews the consequence of spiritual corruption caused by evil deeds and unrepentant sin.

The unfruitful fig tree symbolized the outcome of Israel's indifference and lack of response to God's word of repentance and restoration. The prophets depicted the desolation and calamity of Israel's fall and ruin - due to her unfaithfulness to God - as a languishing fig tree. Jeremiah likened good and evil rulers and members of Israel with figs that were either good for eating or rotten and wasteful (Jeremiah 24:2-8). Jesus' parable depicts the patience of God, but it also contains a warning that we should not presume upon God's patience and mercy. God's judgment will come in due course - very soon or later.

Why does God judge his people? He judges to purify and cleanse us of all sin that we might grow in his holiness and righteousness. And he disciplines us for our own good, to inspire a godly fear and reverence for him and his word. God is patient, but for those who persistently and stubbornly rebel against him and refuse to repent and change their course, there is the consequence that they will lose both their soul and body to hell. Are God's judgments unjust or unloving? *When God's judgments are revealed in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness* (Isaiah 26:9). To pronounce God's judgment on sin is much less harsh than what will happen if those who sin are not warned to repent and turn back to God.

God, in his mercy, gives us time to get right with him, but that time is now. We must not assume that there is no hurry. A sudden and unexpected death leaves one no time to prepare to settle one's accounts when he or she must stand before the Lord on the day of judgment. Jesus warns us that we must be ready at all times. Tolerating sinful habits and excusing unrepentant sin and wrongdoing will result in bad fruit, painful discipline, and spiritual disease that leads to death and destruction. The Lord in his mercy gives us both grace (his gracious help and healing) and time to turn away from sin, but that time is right now. If we delay, even for a day, we may discover that grace has passed us by and our time is up.

- *Do you hunger for the Lord's righteousness (moral goodness) and holiness? What does God need to cultivate in you for you to produce abundant fruit?*

## CLOSING PRAYER

**Leader:** In closing, let us pray together:

**ALL:** Lord Jesus, increase my hunger for you that I may grow in righteousness and holiness. May I not squander the grace of the present moment to say "yes" to you and to your will and plan for my life. Amen.

**Leader:** (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

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