

3rd Sunday Lent Year "C"

March 2-3, 2013

It may bear fruit in the future.

Readings: Exodus 3: 1-8,13-15; 1 Corinthians 10: 1-6, 10-12; Luke 13:1-9

Long before the days of ordering items “online,” I carefully counted the box tops from my breakfast cereal, finally having collected enough for my “free gift.” Dropping them in the mail, I waited for the return package to arrive. The disclaimer–“wait four to six weeks for delivery,” did little to stop this eight year-old from checking the mail everyday. Finally, the toy arrived! It seemed like an eternity, but taught me valuable lessons about waiting, about trusting, and expectation. “It may bear fruit in the future.”

In our life of faith, it seems we also have a very hard time waiting for growth and change. Already, people are anxious because they have not announced a start date for the conclave! I cannot imagine how difficult it will be if the conclave is longer than two days!

The family prays a daily rosary for their father, in hopes that this next interview will result in a job offer. The young couple waits with hopeful expectation that the birth of their first child will be safe and result in a healthy baby boy or girl. The grandmother still prays a Novena for the conversion of her son, in hopes that he will return to the faith. The pain of seeing her grandchildren without the benefit of Baptism is becoming unbearable, yet it is important to trust in the Lord, and not live in perpetual fear.

The mysterious plans of God’s providence remain ever beyond us, and therein lies a good deal of the reason why we must trust. Our Catechism teaches us about divine Providence: The universe was created "in a state of journeying" (*in statu viae*) toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained, to which God has destined it.”¹

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, #302

Quoting the First Vatican Council in 1870, the CCC reads:

By his providence God protects and governs all things which he has made, “reaching mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and ordering all things well”. For “all are open and laid bare to his eyes”, even those things which are yet to come into existence through the free action of creatures.”²

When we trust ourselves, even in the best of circumstances, we may well falter. The problem overwhelms us and we desperately seek an answer right now. Being mindful of the ultimate purpose of divine providence assists us in making sense of the importance of embracing waiting in our lives, and the value of trusting in the Lord.

We see in our Gospel today that the gardener has labored for three years with the fig tree – and yet he sees no fruit. Some of you may know that Apple trees take up to five years to bear fruit; if you like sweet cherries– up to 7 years; if you love Pecan pie- get ready to wait up to twenty years for it to bear fruit. It takes about three years to cultivate a fig tree, and for three years Our Lord ministered among us. Yet, once they bear fruit, fig trees can produce up to several hundred fruits per year. “It may bear fruit in the future.”

It is one of the frustrations of life in modern culture that we lose patience with the grace of God seemingly not working, either in ourselves or in another, and this morning’s Gospel is asking us to repent first before seeking an answer. At the conclusion of this parable, we are left with a tree that is good for nothing. The gardener offers to fertilize around it, but there is no indication that any new growth will actually occur. This tree and its predicament are striking symbols of daily life, especially when our efforts to do good fail or seem to be fruitless, our prayer periods are as dry as dust, and nothing ever seems to happen. So, what are we to do?

² Ibid, cf. Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius* 1: DS 3003; cf. *Wis* 8:1; *Heb* 4:13

Unfortunately, this parable has neither a definitive ending, nor a tightly packed resolution. Jesus is asking us to cling to the Lord no matter what, trusting that his ultimate promises will be made manifest. Can we bear with the lack of resolution? Are we able to endure fruitlessness in the hopes of a better future? Will we allow God's grace to comfort us even when we have a difficult time seeing beyond our present state?

Jesus was looking for the fruit of repentance and it is this that must precede the fruits that he desires to see blossom in our lives. At the beginning of the Gospel we heard of the Galileans who died at the hands of the maliciousness of Pontus Pilate. Eighteen Jerusalemites died by chance when a tower collapsed on them unexpectedly. But the fig tree will die expressly because of inactivity and its own unproductiveness. In the long run, this becomes the greater sin.

During Lent we focus on our need to repent; this must happen first, this must precede the bearing of fruit. In all this process, it is our loving Lord who patiently waits for us to return with open hearts, and allows our souls to bear beautiful fruit that will last. He is giving us one last chance according to the parable.

Today's parable reminds each of us of the necessity of remaining open to God's grace in all of our lives: faithful and fruitful marriages open to life and blessed with children, fruitful lives of prayer nourished by the sacraments, fruitful lives of sacrifice, motivated by the Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.

God will produce the needed fruit in us; let us always trust that His promises to us will be kept, and let us do our part to prepare the soil, our very souls, to receive the seed of His Everlasting Love.