

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Third Sunday of Lent —Year C

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Third Sunday of Lent - Year C

Reading I

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.”

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 103: 1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11.

R. (8a) **The Lord is kind and merciful.**

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.

R. **The Lord is kind and merciful.**

He pardons all your iniquities,
heals all your ills,
He redeems your life from destruction,
crowns you with kindness and compassion.

R. **The Lord is kind and merciful.**

The LORD secures justice
and the rights of all the oppressed.
He has made known his ways to Moses,
and his deeds to the children of Israel.

R. **The Lord is kind and merciful.**

Merciful and gracious is the LORD,
slow to anger and abounding in kindness.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so surpassing is his kindness toward those who fear him.

R. **The Lord is kind and merciful.**

Reading II

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.

Reading 2 (Continued)

1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

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

Verse Before the Gospel

Matthew 4:17

Repent, says the Lord;
the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

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.’”

Exegesis

Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15

For this is one of the most interesting and significant texts in all of Sacred Scripture. God is revealing Himself to us. His response to Moses is I AM WHO I AM (*ehyeh asher ehyeh*). At the burning bush, God gives Moses this name when he asks what to tell the Israelites when they ask who sent him. (Ex 3:13).

Durham notes that this initial statement in and of itself does not constitute a personal name (Durham, *Exodus*, 38). However, in the second part of Exod 3:14, the phrase is shortened to *ehyeh*: “And thus you will say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM (*ehyeh*) sent me to you.’” The personal name Yahweh (*yhwh*), then, is most likely based on the verb “to be” (*hwh*). The phrase in Exod 3:14 is linked to (*yhwh*) explicitly in Exod 3:15.¹

St. Thomas Aquinas would later comment on this passage noting that God is revealing Himself to us not as a supreme being, but as being itself, the one whose very nature is “to be.” God is the source of all being. God is therefore the *arche*, the first Principal. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. Through Him all things came into being. What came to be through Him was life.” (Jn 1: 1-3). Christ, the Eternal Word, is the mediator of all being, all life. St. Paul reminds us that it was Christ who was the Rock that followed them in the desert, from which life-giving water flowed.

He came to Horeb, the mountain of God. Horeb was also called Mt. Sinai, a name derived from the Hebrew word for bush, *seneh*. The fire that does not consume the bush naturally draws Moses’ attention. The fire would later return as the flames of Pentecost as the Holy Spirit was poured forth upon the earth.

In omitted verses 8b-12 God reiterates His concern for His people: “So indeed the cry of the Israelites has reached Me, and I have truly noted that the Egyptians are oppressing them. Come now! I will send you to Pharaoh to lead My people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” (Ex 3: 9-10). God, who is being itself, and the ground of all being, has an intimate personal concern for His chosen people.

Therefore, I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians. God is making it clear to Moses that it will be God, Himself, who will be working in and through Moses, His chosen servant.

W.K. Bechtold III, [“I Am Who I Am,”](#) ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Concise Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021).

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 103: 1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11.

Psalm 103 consists of 22 verses and is titled *Praise of Divine Goodness*. It begins and ends with the same phrase, *Bless the Lord my Soul*.

Bless the Lord, my soul; all my being, bless His holy name! The Hebrew word translated as *bless* is *brk* (pronounced bay-ruck). It can also mean *praise* or *kneel before* as in an act of worship. Certainly, God has no need of our blessing. The Hebrew word for *soul* is *nepes*. *Nepes* first appears in Scripture in the creation story of Genesis. “The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a (*nepes*) living being.” (Gen 2: 7). Note that here *nepes* is translated as *living being*. *Nepes* can also refer to a person’s throat or neck. The breath of God is the source of life that gives humanity life or being. The Hebrew word for *being* in verse 1 is *qe reb* which refers to the innermost part of a person. It can mean the inner organs or the heart. *All my being* is a good translation.

He pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills. There are several references in Scripture associating sin with physical illness and forgiveness of sin with healing. Jesus Himself makes the connection between forgiveness of sins and physical healing as He cures the paralytic. “Child your sins are forgiven... Rise pick up your mat and walk.” (Mk 2: 5, 9).

The refrain is derived from verse 8: *Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger and abounding in kindness*. The underlying Hebrew word that is translated as kindness is *hesed*, which is often translated as *steadfast love*. It describes the faithfulness and immutability of God’s love. It is often translated into Greek as the familiar word, *agape*.

This psalm is a song of thanksgiving for the healing hand of God, perhaps for a physical healing. The psalmist expresses gratitude for the forgiveness of sins, for God’s steadfast love and mercy.

Exegesis (Continued)

1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

St. Paul founded the Christian community at Corinth during his second missionary journey about the year 51. Paul wrote his first letter to them from Ephesus in the year 56. His letter addresses a variety of issues that the fledgling Church was dealing with. Including his famous dissertation on their Eucharistic practices and abuses in Chapter 11.

Chapter 10 is titled *Warning against Overconfidence*. St. Paul beautifully holds up the Exodus event as a paradigm for salvation, e.g., “These things happened as examples for us.” He also places the Christ, the Pre-existing Logos, at the heart of the events in the desert. Paul assumes that his audience is familiar with the Exodus story. The paradigm reminds the community that being a part of the community and being called by God is not enough; it is necessary to persevere in faith and fidelity to God.

At the heart of the Exodus event is the saving hand of God who heard the cry of the people enslaved and being mistreated by the Egyptians. God called and sent Moses and Aaron to be instruments of his saving power. God led the people safely out of Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea. God led them with the cloud and the pillar of light, he fed them with manna and quail in the desert to sustain them on the journey. For those of faith He saved from the fiery serpents. When parched with thirst, He gave them life-giving water from the Rock that was Christ. Those that remained faithful made it to the Promised Land. It was a long journey. The route was not straight, it took many twists and turns. Many did not make it. Many left the community and perished in the desert.

I had always looked at this event from the vantage point of God saving the people from something, i.e., from slavery and oppression. And certainly, it is that. I now see this event as God saving the people for something, for the journey to the Promised Land. For the opportunity to choose life, to choose to be faithful, to choose God.

They drank from the Spiritual Rock that followed them, The event is captured in Exodus Chapter 17: “The people grumbled against Moses, saying, ‘Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children and our livestock?’ So, Moses cried out to the Lord, ‘What will I do with this people? A little more and they will stone me!’ The Lord answered Moses, ‘Go over there in front of the people, along with some of the elders of Israel, holding in your hand, as you go, the staff with which you struck the river. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock in Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will flow from it for the people to drink.’” (Ex 17: 3-6). This is reported in Scripture as a static event on the journey. There is however another similar event recounted in Numbers at a Beer: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Bring the people together, and I will give them water.’ Then it was that Israel sang this song: ‘Spring up, O well! -so sing to it-. Based on this passage rabbinic legend speaks of the rock that followed the people through the desert.

and the Rock was the Christ. God is often referred to in scripture as the “Rock”, e.g. the Rock of our salvation. Flowing water is an analogy for the love, the life, the grace that flows from God. Like a burning bush that is not consumed, the water of God’s life is an endless flow that has no end. Recall the famous image given to us by the Prophet Ezekiel, where the water is flowing out from the sanctuary of the temple and never stops and gives life to all in its path. God is the eternal Rock from which the water of being and life will never cease to flow. The source is the Rock that is Christ. The lance pierced the side of Christ on the Cross, and the water and blood flowed upon the world. From the Altar that water and blood continues to flow upon those who are there to receive.

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 13:1-9

Our pericope today is captioned *A Call to Repentance* and *The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree*. Although most translations divide these two passages in distinct sections with different titles, they are certainly meant to be connected. The first passage sets the stage for the parable.

Jesus begins by giving two examples of tragic, untimely, unpredictable human death. The only known record of the two incidents are in Luke's Gospel. The first tragedy is perpetrated at the direction of Pilate. The Roman Historian Josephus writes about similar acts of terror by Pilate during his reign but do not mention this specific incident. Seemingly, in the act of repentance, in the very act of animal sacrifice in the temple, the people were slaughtered by the Romans and their blood was mixed with the blood of the animals. This was an obvious act of evil inflicted on the innocent, man's inhumanity to man. The second tragedy involves a natural disaster, where a tower collapsed and killed eighteen innocent people. The obvious point that Jesus is making is that we do not know the day or the hour of our earthly death, so be prepared. Now is the time to repent.

Jesus began His public ministry with the call to repent, *metanoia*. Jonah is one of my favorite stories or paradigms of repentance. In the belly of the whale, in his beautiful prayer, Jonah acknowledges that he has disconnected himself from the source of mercy by turning away from God. Then he makes the decision (with a little help from the storm and the whale) to return to God. At its deepest level, *metanoia* is about reconnecting with the source of love and mercy, God.

In his preaching, John the Baptist connects repentance with the bearing of fruit. "Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance; do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God can raise up children of Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." (Lk 3: 8-9).

The vineyard and the fig tree often appear together in Scripture. They are the symbol of Israel and the Covenantal relationship with God. "Like grapes in the desert, I found Israel; Like the first fruits of the fig tree in its prime, I considered your fathers." (Ho 9: 10).

The fig tree is often portrayed as a place to encounter God. "Every man shall sit under his own vine, or under his own fig tree, undisturbed; for the mouth of God has spoken." (Mic 4: 4).

As a symbol of infidelity, the vine and the fig tree will wither. "I will gather them all in, says the Lord: no grapes on the vine, no figs on the fig trees, foliage withered!" (Jer 8: 13).

The nature of the fig tree is to produce figs. It is ordained so by God. "Fear not, O land! Exult and rejoice! For the Lord has done great things. Fear not beasts of the field! For the pastures of the plain are green; the tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and the vine give their yield." (Joel 2: 21-22).

Not to bear fruit would thwart God's plans. As human beings we were created out of love for love. Love is our nature. To love is to bear fruit that will last. Not to love is to thwart God's plans for us.

The message is clear. There is still time to fulfill our purpose, but that time on this earth is not unlimited!

Reflection

We are blessed to have some of the richest texts in all Sacred Scripture this weekend. Our first reading contains the famous passage from the third chapter of the Book of Exodus. God appears to Moses in the burning bush that is not consumed, and He reveals Himself to us as the great I AM. In doing so he is teaching us that He is not a Supreme Being as I learned in the Baltimore Catechism, but that He is Being itself. He is the one whose very nature is to be. As such He is the source of all being, the source of all that is. St. John teaches us in the prologue to his gospel that all things came into being through Him. In the creation story, God took the clay of the earth and breathed His life breath into it and man became a living being.

Our second reading from St. Paul reminds us that God is not only the giver of life, but the sustainer of life as well. Recalling the Exodus event, St. Paul says: “All ate from the same spiritual food, and all drank from the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ.” God is often referred to in scripture as the “Rock”, e.g. the Rock of our salvation. Flowing water is an analogy for the love, the life, the grace that flows from God. Like a burning bush that is not consumed the water of God’s life is an endless flow that has no end. Recall the famous image given to us by the Prophet Ezekiel, where the water is flowing out from the sanctuary of the temple and never stops and gives life to all in its path. God is the eternal Rock from which the water of being and life will never cease to flow. Those who were there to receive the Manna from Heaven and the water from the rock were sustained with life and made it to the Promised Land. Those that left and wandered off in the desert perished. St. Paul reminds us that this must serve as an example for us.

In our Gospel this weekend Jesus tells us the parable of the fig tree. The purpose of the fig tree is to produce fruit. It was not living according to its purpose. It was not bearing fruit and consequently was simply taking up space and exhausting the soil. As nice as it may have looked, as green as it may have been, even the good that it was doing producing life-giving oxygen; it was not good enough. It was not fulfilling the purpose for which it was created. Like the metaphor of the Vine and the Branches, the fig tree was created to be a conduit of the flow of God’s life-giving water. Its purpose for being is to transform the water and nutrients drawn from the soil and running through its branches to bear fruit for the world. The poor little tree was keeping all the nutrients for itself and not fulfilling its life-giving purpose. It was not fulfilling God’s plan, and so Jesus ordered it to be cut down and destroyed... but then the little tree was given one more chance. And that is the lesson for us. Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love.

Yours in Christ,



Personal Witness

In my early thirties a very close friend of mine who was my age, with whom I played football in college, and my roommate, was killed in an automobile accident. He was alone in his vehicle, parked at a red light, and he was struck head on by a drunk driver. He was on his way to a men's league basketball tournament. If not for being out of town on a business trip, I would have been in the car with him. He left behind a pregnant wife. He would never see his only son in this lifetime.

My first concern was for my friend and his eternal soul. He was a good friend, a good person, and a great husband to his young wife. He would have been a great family man. I know that he was a believer, but he was not particularly religious. He was not a church goer. I continue to pray for him to this day, almost forty years later.

After the mourning process of a few days, I really began to do some soul searching of my own. What if I were in that car? Was I in right relationship with God? Was I ready to meet Jesus face to face? The inner journey that followed made me realize just how far I had drifted from God. I was a religious person. I attended Mass regularly every Sunday and holy days of obligation. But I attended out of a sense of obligation. I had become very mechanical in my faith. I was not ready to die! I was not in right relationship with God.

It was apparent to me just how complacent I had become in my faith. I felt a certain comfort in the mechanical practice of faith. I was meeting all of the obligations. Perhaps, I had become a bit like Job in that I was feeling in good legal standing with God. After all, I was obeying all (most) of His laws and decrees, I was following the laws of His Church. In my inner soul searching I quickly concluded that that was not enough. God was asking more of me; He was searching for a personal relationship with me.

I am thankful that I once had a very strong personal relationship with Jesus. From my earliest memories as a child, I recall that deep intimate relationship with Him. Admittedly it was a very one sided, childish, self-centered relationship, but a relationship non-the-less. In prayer I did most of the talking, but I knew that Jesus was there and was listening.

Now in mid-life, in my searching, a new and more balanced friendship followed. I was now ready to begin to listen in this communication process. This new relationship opened up an entirely new world for me, and ultimately led to my vocation as a priest. It is a relationship that I vow to never take for granted again. Everyday I am more and more aware of the frailty of this life, and the tenuousness of eternal life. I have totally surrendered my life to Jesus. Every day I renew my relationship with Jesus in prayer and at the Altar. I place all my trust in Him. In gazing upon the Cross, I am confident, how could so much love not raise me up?

