

Third Sunday of Lent (Year C)

Reading 1: Exodus 3: 1 – 8a, 13 - 15

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 103: 1 - 2, 3 – 4, 6 – 7, 8, 11

Reading II: I Corinthians 10: 1 – 6, 10 - 12

Gospel: Lk 13: 1 - 9

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

[Third Sunday of Lent | USCCB](#)



Jesus and the Fig tree

The story of Moses and the burning bush is one of the key scriptural passages in both Judaism and Christianity. It has shaped our understanding of God and of how God relates with humanity.

Moses had fled Egypt where he had been raised and was tending the sheep of his father-in-law. He saw what appeared to be a bush on fire but the bush was not being consumed. As he approached, he was told to come no nearer for he was on holy ground. God then declared that he had heard the cries of the people of Israel and that he had come to rescue them. He identified himself as the God of their ancestors. In section that is skipped, God commands Moses to go and tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. Moses wants to know who is giving this order and God replies with the four sacred letters in Hebrew, YHWH.

There are several layers to unpack. God's declaration that he has heard the cries of the people opens the value of prayer that requests God's help. God really does care and is moved by the suffering of people. God is not removed nor uncaring. It is our basis for praying for God's help in difficult situations.

Secondly, when asked for a name, God does not give one. God's reply is "I am who am" and later says, "I am". God is the source of all existence and the sustainer of all existence. All creation, human, animal, plant, and mineral, came through God's existence. This invites us to see God reflected all around us. In nature and in people, God is manifest and continue in existence through God's support. Each day as you awaken, one can be aware of God in each breathe, in opening one's eyes, and in each movement for all is a gift from God. This is reflected in the bush not being burnt. God is in each person but does not destroy us. God is there to affirm life and sustain life even if a person ignores God.

The sacred four letters are never spoken in Judaism for to speak someone's name requires that person to respond and one can never command God. When these letters appear in the bible, the Jewish tradition says Lord. Out of similar reverence, the Catholic Church does not speak these letters in worship.

The Gospel passage has two parts. The first deals with the deaths of people under Pilate and in a construction accident. Jesus challenges the prevailing concept that people die because they have done something wrong and are being punished. Jesus draws upon the teachings offered in the Book of Job. Suffering and death are not caused by the sin of a person yet suffering is real. One does not know when suffering and death will come so it is important for everyone to turn to God for life. The experience of suffering and death is much more complicated than how someone has sinned. Jesus says now is the time for everyone to repent and find life in God. Just because you are living a good life does not mean that death could not come today.

The second part of the Gospel offers a parable about a tree that does not bear fruit. It could be cut down but the gardener intercedes for it and asks for time. In conjunction with other parables, the tree probably represents the leadership of Judaism that is not feeding the

people. Rather than destroy Judaism, it is given more time that it may draw from the nutrients that God is offering in Jesus teaching. God desires life not destruction.

The second reading is typology. This was a way of interpreting the Hebrew scriptures in light of the Christian experience. Paul sees the Exodus as way to understand the Christian journey. The Hebrew people were freed from slavery and journeyed through the desert. Having experienced God's great work in passing through the sea and having God's presence guide them via a cloud, they did not trust God in the desert but grumbled against God. God called them to repentance. Christians, who have experienced new life through Gospel, baptism, and the Eucharist, sometimes do not live as followers of Jesus but want to do things their way. They grumble and complain. Like the people of Israel, Christians must repent and live in the way that God is calling them.

Reflection Questions:

How do you understand God and God's presence in your life?

How do you address God? What names or titles do you use most frequently?

How do you understand the reality of suffering and following God? Have you had to face what you thought was unjust suffering?

How do you understand your need to repent and seek God's forgiveness?

Themes

Exodus and time in the desert

Repentance

Names of God

The Christian journey

Suffering

Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that the Holy Spirit will nurture and renew us so that we may bear the abundant fruits of virtue and vibrant discipleship

For transformation of our minds and hearts: that we may embrace the Gospel message, be converted from misdirected desires, and embrace our new life in Christ

For the grace to experience everything as gift: that in knowing God as the source of all existence, we may appreciate each day and each breath as a loving gift from God

For the gift of awe: that we may reverence the holy ground on which we stand the many blessings that we have received, our bonds of friendship, and our community of faith

For openness to God's presence: that we may be open to the surprising ways God is with us and desires to work within us and never limit how God can be revealed to us