

Homily 3rd Sunday Lent Yr C: Bearing Spiritual Fruit

By Fr. Dwight P. Campbell, S.T.D.

Our first reading is from the book of Exodus. God called Moses to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt, into the promised land – a land “flowing with milk and honey.”

God revealed His name to Moses: I AM WHO AM – YAHWEH in Hebrew - which is the most perfect name for God, meaning that God depends upon no one for his existence; He is eternal, with no beginning and no end.

God spoke to Moses in a bush - that was burning, but the fire in the bush did not consume the bush.

In the centuries that followed, Christian writers have tried to interpret the meaning of this bush that was burning but was not consumed.

Some have thought that the burning bush is a symbol for the Catholic Church, which in spite of trials and persecutions will continue to endure until the end of time.

Others have seen in the burning bush an image of the blessed Virgin Mary, in whom the fire of the Holy Spirit always burned in a magnificent way.

Mary is commonly referred to as the “spouse of the Holy Spirit”: she was filled with grace to a degree that only God can comprehend it;

and, because she was preserved from Original Sin and our fallen human nature, she was always totally responsive to the movements and inspirations of the Holy Spirit at work in her soul.

Therefore, Mary is a model for all of us in perfectly responding to God’s will in our lives.

Unlike the Virgin Mary, we are burdened with a fallen human nature, and we sin – sometimes we do our own will rather than God’s will.

God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us from our sins, to give us a share of God's own life - which we receive at baptism, and to teach us how to live life in the Spirit, bearing spiritual fruit.

Knowing that we are sinners, Jesus began His public preaching with these words: *"The Kingdom of God is at hand; **repent**, and believe in the Gospel."*

Notice the order of the words: in order to believe in the Gospel, the teaching of Our Lord, we first need to repent of our sins.

This repeats this message in the Gospel today from St. Luke.

He uses two examples - of people that were killed under Pontius Pilate, and upon whom a tower fell and killed, and says: *"Do you think that these people were greater sinners and more guilty than you? By no means."*

Then He says: *"I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did."*

Then Jesus tells the parable about a man who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and for three years he found no fruit on the fig tree. It was worthless, so he ordered his servant to cut it down.

The servant persuades him to spare it for another year, saying he will cultivate the ground and fertilize it so that it may bear fruit; but then if it does not, he will cut it down.

How do we apply this parable to our lives? At baptism we were given gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit; and in the Sacrament of Confirmation we were strengthened in these gifts and graces – and for what purpose? That we might bear spiritual fruit.

If we want to know whether we are living good, holy lives – living out the gifts and graces that we received at Baptism and Confirmation, we must

examine our lives to see whether or not our lives are producing spiritual fruits.

In fact, St. Paul reveals to us a list of fruits of the Holy Spirit. Here are some of those “Fruits of the Spirit”: peace, joy, patience, kindness, and charity.

Am I at peace – interiorly, with myself, and with others – those with whom I live, and work? Or am I often unsettled, in a state of agitation - with myself, and others?

Do I exude joy in my life? Do I make an effort to be joyful, and bring the joy of Christ to others? Or am I grumpy, always complaining about this or that when things don’t go my way?

Do I practice patience? Do I accept the crosses that God, in His loving Providence, arranges for me on a daily basis. Or do I get easily upset and fly off the handle at the least inconvenience or obstacle that confronts me?

Do I strive to be kind towards others, willing to look for their good points rather than focus on their faults and shortcomings? Am I willing, in kindness, to look past the sins and failings of others, to forgive them, and to pray for them?

Am I always charitable, willing to spend myself for others and their needs, rather than focusing always on myself?

If we examine our conscience and are honest, we know that we all fail in these areas. We need to repent of our sins and failings. The Sacrament of Penance gives us the opportunity to do just this.

Lent is a good time to take an accounting of our lives, examine our conscience, and make a good confession. Here are some of the many benefits the Sacrament of Penance offers (by Bishop Austin Vaughn):

“Every time I go to Confession, I acknowledge that I am a sinner. I am not just part of sinful humanity, but I have sins of my own that were my own fault.”

“Every time I go to Confession, I affirm implicitly that God’s mercy is always available to me and that no sin is unforgivable.”

“Every time I go to Confession, I reaffirm that a priest is God’s minister in a unique way.”

“Every time I go, I implicitly reaffirm that God expects me to do better, with and through His grace.”

Let us take advantage of this great Sacrament of God’s mercy and forgiveness in this holy season of Lent.