

My Dear people of God,

We are now midway on our Lenten journey as we today celebrate the third Sunday of this holy season. On this third Sunday of Lent, the Liturgy of the Word provides us another opportunity of grace to intentionally straighten us on our journey of faith. The readings of this Sunday, invite us to reflect on the Lord who frees us from our slavery to sin, if only we listen to His warning to repent. The focus of this Sunday therefore is **Repentance**, *the intentional turning away from sin*.

The refrain (response) to the Responsorial Psalm today captures the underlying current to this Sunday's message: "**The Lord is kind and merciful.**" Indeed the Lord is kind and merciful and this is manifested in many ways. One of the principal manifestations of this is in the Lord's call to us to repent, to turn away from sin. This is kindness because instead of condemning and damning us, the Lord gives us an opportunity to fix our situation.

Sad to say, many times, we do not take advantage of this wonderful offer and instead regard it as something unimportant. But truth be told, repentance is an important step in our journey of salvation. It is a way through which God's saving grace is mediated to us. Repentance in essence means, acknowledging our sins, feeling sorry for those sins we have committed and acknowledged, and a firm resolve not to deliberately commit them again. Sincere repentance provokes God's compassion, mercy and love.

In our second reading, St Paul writing to the Church in Corinth and indeed to all of us, highlights the consequences of deliberately going contrary to God's will. He does this by using an example that was familiar to the people of Corinth and indeed to all of us who are familiar with the Exodus from Egypt. In spite of the dramatic way God manifested His love the people enslaved in Egypt, several times they rebelled and sinned against Him to extent of even wishing to go back to Egypt! (Ex 16:1ff). Using that background, St Paul concluded by warning that: "*All these happened as a warning, and it was written down to be a lesson for us who are living at the end of the age.*" In his letter to the Romans he puts it directly: "*The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life*" (Rom 6, 23.)

In the gospel reading today, Jesus was very direct in his words when he said: "*Unless you repent you will perish.*" One might say that this is too harsh to come from Christ who is merciful and compassionate. The truth is that when Jesus speaks this way, it does not diminish His compassion and mercy. Rather, He does so because He actually cares for us and sees what we cannot see. He simply warns us of the negative consequences of living a sinful life and wants us to repent and live a better life. In our modern day language, you can call it **tough love**.

The good news this Sunday is that we are given the opportunity to learn from the failures of our ancestors and the consequences of their actions. More importantly, we are given another opportunity to call upon the Lord who is "*merciful, compassionate and loving.*" Jesus wants us to take a bold and positive step towards amending our way of life. This is a call to repentance for the times we neglected and failed both God and our neighbors; for the times we chose evil over good; and for those moments we despaired and displayed remarkable lack of faith in God.

The patient, compassionate and loving Father is ready welcome us back. Repentance attracts mercy, compassion, forgiveness and salvation. It brings about healing and restoration of hope for a better future. So, if we sincerely repent of our sins, God will not only forgive us, but He will heal us.

My dear brothers and sisters, this holy season of Lent keeps reminding us of our need to grow in goodness and holiness. In order to benefit from it, we need to be intentional in doing something special this season. Unfortunately, some people do nothing special during Lent, they think they are 'good enough.' Others start off with a great deal of enthusiasm, praying more, making sacrifices or doing good works but as the season progresses, they ease up on their good resolutions. My dear friends in the Lord, we still have three more weeks of Lent. The word of God today invites us to do all we can, to repent so that we can come to Easter with minds and hearts that are renewed.

God bless you,

Fr Simon Peter