

## Homily Notes for Sunday, March 24, 2019 Third Lent C

Readings: Ex. 3:1-8, 13-15; I Cor. 10:1-6, 10-12; Luke 13: 1-9

Repentance is not just for correcting sins, it is also necessary to do the will of God.

**1. Today we are not just dealing with repentance, but with a focus on how repentance prepares to be useful to God in service.** Let's look at our readings from this point of view.

**2. The first reading** presents the call of Moses. If we read the story carefully in Exodus 3 - 4, we see that Moses was not at all eager to return to Egypt where he was under a sentence of death for murder. Only after the miracle of the "burning bush" which was not consumed and after an extensive argument with God, and after God, himself, got angry with Moses would Moses consent to return to Egypt to free his people. God was understanding and patient. But, nevertheless, God also got angry (Ex 4:14) and only then did Moses decide to repent and go back to free his people in Egypt.

**3. In the second reading: St. Paul illustrates how many of the Israelites fell away from God after having experienced the miracles of the Exodus.** St. Paul warns the Christians of Corinth that they too could fall from grace and that they must learn from the sad experience of the Israelites who were punished for their sins by a merciful but just God. This is a "Warning against Overconfidence." St Paul reminds them that the Israelites, led by Moses, passed miraculously through the sea as they escaped from Egypt. God led them across the desert by means of a cloud and gave them water from the rock when they were thirsty and manna as their staple food. Despite all these wonders, however, many apparently lost their faith. Therefore, God let many of them die in the desert without reaching the Promised Land. Paul sternly warns the Corinthians that they are in the same danger, *"Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care lest he fall.*

**4. Theological and apologetic insight: against once saved, always saved.** St Paul observes that those who finally did evil and were condemned were also those who had participated, apparently in good faith, in all the events of the Exodus, and had been faithful until a certain point when they became unfaithful. St Paul is warning the believers in Corinth that the same thing could happen to them.

1 Cor 15:1-2. Here St. Paul recognizes that we can believe in vain.

"Now I am reminding you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you indeed received and in which you also stand. Through it you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain."

Furthermore, in the last chapter of his last letter (II Cor 13:5), he commands us to examine ourselves continually:

"Examine your selves to see whether you are living in faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless, or course, you fail the test. I hope you will discover that we have not failed."

**5. Today's Gospel reading contains first a warning to repent, then a warning to be fruitful.** Here Jesus reminds us that those who do not repent will perish. By this he means spiritually that if we don't repent of mortal sin, we will be condemned and be sent to Hell. We are called to abandon our false gods of money, power and pleasure, pride and vanity and return to the one God, who "secures justice and the rights of all the oppressed." (On repentance, see on contrition (CCC 1451) and penance (CCC 1430ff). "The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, *fasting, prayer, and almsgiving*, which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God and to others" (CCC 1434).

**6. The second part of the reading is a parable about the merciful patience of God.** It is exactly this patience and this mercy of God that Pope Francis is highlighting with this Year of Mercy. The metaphorical story of the *fig tree planted in the vineyard* reminds us of the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7 Note that ordinarily a fig tree would produce fruit its third year after being planted. Here God is giving it an additional year to repent and to become fruitful.

**7. We need to be concerned about careful wording.** The “Love of God” is often described as “unconditional”. But the Ten Commandments are described as the conditions of the Covenant. How can there be conditions to the unconditional love of God (See Jn 14:21, 15:10)? The term “unconditional” never appears in the Bible nor in the Catechism to describe the love of God for us. God’s love is described as “everlasting, almighty, as Divine providence, slow to anger and abounding.” God always loves us, but “unconditional” could be misunderstood that we have to do nothing. We must believe in Jesus and repent of our sins, obeying the commandments and the teachings of Jesus to be saved and go to heaven.

**8. The Gospel and the Call to Repentance:** The Good News of the Gospel is not just that we will be forgiven by faith, but that by faith and the Holy Spirit we will be given the power to repent of our sins and that God will eagerly be awaiting us to serve him after our repentance. Faith is the beginning, but we must respond in obedience once we have received this faith.

**9. This parable tells us of the Gospel of the “Second Chance.”** Through this parable, believers are reminded of the patience of a God, who is willing to give sinners chance after chance to reform their lives and to seek reconciliation. Even when sinners waste or refuse those chances, God, in His mercy, allows still more opportunities for them (for us) to repent. And, just as the farmer tended the barren fig tree with special care, so God affords sinners whatever graces they need to leave their sinful ways behind and return to God’s love. It is always Jesus’s way to give us chance after chance. But the parable also makes it quite clear that *there is a final chance*. If we refuse chance after chance, if God’s appeal and challenge come again and again in vain, the day finally comes when we, by deliberate choice, have shut ourselves out. God save us from that!

**10. Our Lord stresses that we need to produce plenty of fruit (cf. Lk 8:11-15) in keeping with the graces we have received (cf. Lk 12:47-48).** While God waits patiently for this fruit to appear, if we neglect our duties and become lazy and comfort-seeking, he is also just and he will punish failure to respond to his grace (cf. Navarre Bible on this passage and John 15).

**11. How do all these readings fit together?** Pope Francis makes clear that this invitation is a merciful invitation to conversion, to actual repentance. He reminds us that God is that merciful Father who is always eager to forgive his repentant children. He calls for conversion from the most serious kinds of evil; from criminal behavior, from corruption (#19 Misericordiae Vultus). God is ready and eager to forgive us, if we but repent.

**12. It is also a time to reawaken the practice of the Works of Mercy.** Pope Francis says, “It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy... Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples” (15b). In Year of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, we want our lives to change to that we will involve ourselves in both the Spiritual and the Corporal Works of Mercy. They are:

#### **Spiritual Works of Mercy**

1. To instruct the ignorant
2. To counsel the doubtful
3. To admonish sinners
4. To bear wrongs patiently
5. To forgive offences willingly
6. To comfort the afflicted
7. To pray for the living and the dead

#### **Corporal Works of Mercy**

1. To feed the hungry
2. To give drink to the thirsty
3. To clothe the naked
4. To shelter the homeless
5. To visit the sick
6. To ransom the captive
7. To bury the dead

**13. What is the one idea that God wants you to get out of this Mass, today, to help you become the better-version-of-yourself that God wants and needs in the world, today?**