### **Readings for March 23, 2025 -- Third Sunday in Lent**

**Fruitful Living**

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### *Today's scriptures present stories of two trees: the burning bush that represents the reality of a soul that is receptive to God's presence, and the fig tree, which represents God's presence resisted and refused. (Bishop Robert Barron)*

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### **Opening Prayer:** Thank you for bringing us together, Oh God. We praise you and ask you to always make us receptive to your presence and action in our lives. Help us to hear your Word and take it to heart. Amen.

**Reading 1 EX 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** PS 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 2**  1 COR 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.
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.

**Gospel** LK 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.'"

Related Reflections

**What is fruitfulness?**

Do we have to do the most possible good for the poor? Do we have to be highly effective at ministry? Are we supposed to work around the clock so that we can use our gifts to the fullest? What about our jobs? Are we unfruitful if we are unemployed? How hard do we have to work in order not to count as unfruitful? How successful do we have to be at that work?

The thing to notice here is that all these questions rest on a false presupposition. The fruitfulness at issue doesn’t come from our work. In [several Gospel accounts] we see owners of a vineyard, who is God, plants the vines, spades the soil, removes the stones, and protects the vineyard. If the vines bear fruit, it is because God worked so hard at the vineyard.

So also our fruitfulness comes not from our own work, but from the work of God’s spirit in us.

What God is looking for in us, then, is the fruits of the Spirit. And these are love, joy, peace, patience and long-suffering. God has planted himself deep within us in the indwelling Holy Spirit. No lack of success in work, no lack of work itself, can keep us from responding to him with love and joy and the rest.

And these are what make us fruitful for the Lord.

 (Eleonore Stump, Professor of Philosphy, St. Louis University)

What drives Christ to pull attention away from speculative matters (the story of the Galileans) and redirect it to a fundamental intercourse between divine and human wills? There is little indication in the episode. However, I fantasize he is moved by a great sadness brought on by the sight of wasted soil and fruitless trees. I recently read of a very successful business leader who had died. His wife was asked if he was a happy man. She replied that he had trouble with happiness because he was almost “physically revolted by the idea of unrealized potential left on the table.” There is something of that intensity in Jesus’ plea for repentance…We are fig trees called upon to bear fruit.

 (John Shea, The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels, Liturgical Press)

**MORE ALIVE, MORE HUMAN 32. *(To depend on God sets us free)***

Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy. On the contrary, you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self. To depend on God sets us free from every form of enslavement and leads us to recognize our great dignity…To the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will **bear greater fruit** for our world.

(Pope Francis, Gaudate et Exsultate - The Exhortation, Rejoice and Be Glad)

In the second half of the Gospel, Jesus tells us a parable. An orchard owner orders his gardener to chop down a sadly unproductive fig tree. The gardener advises him to leave it one more year and see if, with some tending, it will bear fruit. Give it one more chance.

Who does the heartless orchard owner represent? We always assume that it is God. We half-remember the story in [Mt 21:18-19](http://www.usccb.org/bible/matthew/21%3A18) of Jesus actually cursing a fruitless fig tree. But, on the contrary, Jesus *is not the orchard owner* *but the gardener*, *asking mercy for the disobedient fig tree*.

Isn’t this exactly what he is doing when he warns that the people will perish if they don’t repent? Isn’t he shouting at all of us to turn back to God in order to avoid destruction? Yes.

He is “startling the poor sheep back” from the edge of the cliff (to paraphrase the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins [here](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44403/the-wreck-of-the-deutschland)) and you and I are the sheep. There is still reason to fear God, of course, since he is infinite, and infinitely more fiery than the burning bush. But the closer you come to the real center of God, the more your fear turns to gratitude. You are not scalded or consumed by the divine fire—you are warmed and gentled at its welcoming hearth. Jesus’ tough love leads us to that heart.

Fr. John Foley, SJ – published on liturgy.slu.edu

The owner of the fig tree only cares about whether the tree bears fruit—he has no regard for the tree and its life. The gardener, on the other hand, cares about the fig tree, sees the life still there, and wants to give it every chance (“I shall cultivate … and fertilize it”) to produce. He understands that as long as there’s life, there’s potential to bear fruit. What wastes away life within us and prevents us from bearing fruit is sin. Repentance, then, means choosing to nurture new life and all the fullness it can bring.

From St. Louis University – liturgy.slu.edu

I expect that patience has always been a difficult thing for many people to exercise. But today’s world might just be the most impatient in all of human history. Technology enables and demands instant responses. If my Internet connection is even a tiny bit slow, I feel my gut tensing up. If I don’t get a quick response to an email, I can feel angry or rejected. And so it goes. Thus, we will find it harder and harder to bear fruit for the Lord with patience.

Here is a truth from God’s word to which I need to cling today. Bearing fruit, real fruit, lasting fruit, doesn’t happen quickly. It requires patience, even endurance.

I want my life to matter, to make a difference in people's lives and in our world. I expect this is true for you, also. Though we can exhaust ourselves in our daily routines without thinking about why we do what we do, when we step back and catch our breath, we feel a deep desire for fruitfulness. We want our lives to count. Jesus reinforced this purpose through his teaching. In [**John 15:8**](https://biblia.com/bible/nrsv/John%2015.8), for example, he said, "This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

How can we live fruitful lives, fulfilling our created purpose, not to mention the yearning of our hearts? Jesus answers this question by emphasizing our connection to him. We bear fruit by "remaining" in him as branches "remain" in the vine (John 15:4-8). Daily Reflection from: *Theologyofwork.org*

Discussion Questions

Do you give people another chance after they make a mistake, as Jesus shows us with this faithful gardener in his parable?

Does God use people as “gardeners” to help cultivate and fertilize with grace? Does God use you? Has God used others to help you bear fruit?

The work of repentance, of bearing lasting fruit requires patience. How does this relate to our desert theme? Can we remember who is the one who makes the greenery spring forth out of nothing? (from our Introductory reflection at the front of this packet). Why does patience often seem so hard?

In the first reading, we see Moses tending his flock and doing simple, everyday things. For us, even though we may not hear an external voice of God, there is an inner voice that calls us to encounter the holy. How can we break away from our habitual perceptions, our patterned responses and actions?

* Where are we called to see and hear more deeply?
* How do we see “I Am Who Am” in the midst of the familiar?
* How can we develop an awareness of the holy within the ordinary tasks, relationships?

**Closing Prayer:**

Gracious God, help me to live a life that’s rooted in the rich soil of your grace. Allow me to be a vessel that reflects your goodness to the world, and guide me to use my gifts and talents to serve others, and bring glory to you.

If I am grafted on – strongly rooted in you – I will live a more fruitful life.

We ask through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

Also:

O Lord, show me the truth about my life, so that I might live fully and fruitfully for you. Amen.

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Weekly Focus Questions:

What was my “desert place” this week?

Was I able to see something new and green springing forth from this?

**For further meditation this week:**

Once again our readings mention the idea of fruitfulness. How am I doing in living a “fruitful” life? What parts of my life seem to be bearing the most fruit? What parts might need some “cultivating?”

Jesus,
kind and patient
gardener of
souls:

when we are barren like your fig tree,
(with unjust war, racial bias,
destruction of our
climate)

you don’t give
up on us.

Please,
soak our roots.
Make them
heavy with your love.

And,

pour your grace upon us like
water on parched
land

until we bear fruit.

Anne Osdieck