

Our readings continue with the theme of salvation history

Last week we read about Abram

The promises God made to him

That his descendants would be as numberless as the stars

Today we see they have become a great nation

Although they had been driven from their homeland

They had followed Joseph to Egypt

Then after Joseph's death, they were enslaved

They were the building the cities of Egypt

Yet they were slaves

They had no freedom to worship their God

But God had predicted this to Abraham

And He had also promised to send a deliverer

He fulfills that promise in Moses

He fulfills it to us in Christ

In our reading today, Moses receives his marching orders from God

To go to the Egyptians and tell Pharaoh to free his people

Moses is at work

It begins as a normal day, tending his father in law's flock

When he notices something strange

A bush that had caught fire was probably not that unusual

But for the bush to not be consumed by the fire

This caught his attention

Moses goes toward the bush

And finds himself in the presence of God

On holy ground

God tells him

I have seen the affliction of my people

I have come down to them

To lead them to a land flowing with milk and honey

God would use Moses to accomplish His work

But Moses wants to know

How can I convince them?

Whom should I tell them sent me?

I am who am

Tell them: *I AM sent me*

The God of your fathers

The God of Abraham,

The God of Isaac

The God of Joseph

This name means the God who is God

He is telling them the other gods

The gods of the Egyptians do not exist

Or at the most are creatures of His

He alone exists of himself

And is the source of existence for all other beings

We know what happened

St Paul recaps it in our second reading

The escape from Egypt

The crossing of the Red Sea

The manna

The water flowing from the rock

Yet their hardness of heart kept them from the Promised Land

Those that were alive when they escaped from Egypt all died

Even Moses never entered the Promised Land

It was the next generation that took possession

These things are examples for us today

Not to desire evil things

And not to have a false sense of salvation

Whoever thinks he is standing secure

Should take care not to fall

A warning similar to the one Jesus gives

He refers to 2 current events

One was a massacre by Pontius Pilate

His troops had murdered some Galileans

Then they mixed their blood with that of animal sacrifices

Do you think that this meant they were greater sinners than others?

Or what about an accident?

When the tower at Siloam fell on a group of people

Killing 18 of them

Were they more guilty than the rest of the population?

No.

But if we do not repent, we are in the same boat as them

This is the meaning of the parable of the fig tree

This parable is told as Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem for the last time

He knew his time on earth was coming to an end

And he warns us that our time is limited as well

This is the last lent for some of us here today

For some, it may not come as much of a shock

But there are undoubtedly some here today

That will not be with us at this time next year

Accidents and health issues will happen

And they happen to the good and the bad alike

The young, the old and those in between

So we ask: where am I in my relationship with Christ?

Am I like the fig tree in the parable?

Everything healthy looking on the outside

But bearing no fruit?

Perhaps I am at Mass every week

But my heart is far from God

I am only here to fulfill an obligation

My mind and heart are far away

Perhaps I simply take

It is easy to get caught up in ourselves

Refusing to sacrifice for others

Refusing to live lives of service

Taking from the family

Taking from the parish

Taking from the community

The fig tree took nutrients from the soil

It took up water

It took in sunshine

But it gave nothing back

It looked healthy on the outside

It was barren, there was no fruit

So in the time we have

Which is today

Before we are cut down

We are called to bear fruit

So how do we cultivate?

What is our fertilizer?

In a word: metanoia or conversion

Based on the 3 foundations of lent

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving

There still is holy ground

Where God is present in a special way

We know God can be found anywhere

In the woods or in nature

In our friends and family

But not in the same way that he is found in our churches

That is why we have tabernacles

It is why we reserve the Blessed Sacrament

Because Jesus is present

Body, blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharist

We come to meet him in a special way at Mass and in adoration

Remembering that when we enter a church,

We are entering sacred, holy ground

And we respect that ground with a reverent silence

For ourselves and for our neighbor

It is not a place for cell phones or video games

It is not a place to show off the latest fashion

It is a place of prayer and worship, that we are called to reflect

Fasting adds to our prayer

When we fast, we make less of ourselves

And make room for God

Fasting from food, denying some aspect of the digital age

Removing or limiting email, twitter, Facebook, the internet

We are so filled with noise, both visual and audio, God can be ignored

Rather than adding more and more

Rather than trying to be entertained at every moment

We are called to empty our hearts of the distractions

So God can fill them with His love

Almsgiving

The prayers and fasting have to become real

They cannot remain simply a spiritual exercise

When we give something that is dear to us

Hard earned money

Or ourselves in service to another

This is the fruit Christ is looking for

Letting go of our casual approach to our faith

Because the cross is not casual

St. Paul's warning stands

Whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall

Conversion is the cross

It is real

It is bloody

It hurts

It changes how we see death and suffering

It changes how we see life

But it is not the end

We go through Good Friday

So we can truly live on Easter morning

Happy Lent