

Missionary Commentary

Third Sunday of Lent, Year C
March 23, 2025

Sunday Readings

Exodus 3:1, 13-15
Psalm 103:1-8, 11
1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12
Luke 13:1-9
[USCCB Link to the Readings](#)

Continuously Bearing Fruit

The parable in today's Gospel is only somewhat familiar. It is often called the "Parable of Fruitless Fig Tree." Specifically chosen as the Gospel for a Lenten Sunday, Jesus' narrative is aimed at us as *hearers of the Word*. How do we respond to this interesting narrative?

Background. To better understand this particular parable, one can draw insights from a brief discussion on parables. Jesus used many graphic analogies to communicate his kingdom message, making it concrete and intelligible for his hearers. Fully one-third of Jesus' recorded teaching in the Gospels is found in his parables, numbering about fifty. Jesus, the master-teacher, constantly used concrete language to transmit his message effectively.

Parable has been described in a variety of ways. It is an "earthly story with a heavenly meaning." A parable is "a narrative drawn from nature or human circumstances whose object is to teach a spiritual lesson." Parables emerge from common life experience and are used "as a means of illustrating profound, divine truths." Hearers are challenged to discover for themselves the truth of the parable—and then to integrate it into their personal lives.

A Fruitless Tree. Three entities in this parable have clear symbolic significance. The vineyard owner represents God; the gardener refers to Jesus, who feeds the tree and waters it; the tree symbolizes the nation of Israel—and also us. We have been lovingly planted in God's garden; fruitfulness is expected of us.

The vineyard owner would be perfectly justified in tearing down the fruitless tree; his ax was poised to uproot the tree. The compassionate gardener pleads for more time to water and fertilize the plant. The gracious Lord of the vineyard extends his patience for one more year.

God's Patience. One lesson for us is to realize that we are living on "borrowed time;" God's patience has its limits. In his mercy God grants us another day, another month or year. Christ continues to stand at the door of our heart, seeking to gain entrance. However, if there is no fruit, no repentance, God's patience will come to an end.

We seek the Lord while He may be found; we call on Him while he is near, especially during this time of Lent. We are challenged to open our hearts

next page

continued from previous page

and allow God's powerful Word to penetrate. Do we have spiritually receptive hearts and minds? Do we genuinely hear God's Word?

God expects fruitfulness from us; Jesus says: "You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I sent you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will endure" (John 15:16).

Personal Vignette. As a boy I grew up on a farm; I witnessed the great care and effort that my father took to assure a good harvest. He prepared and fertilized the soil, planted the seed carefully, cultivated and weeded the crop, nurtured it as it grew, prayed earnestly for proper rain and to be spared from any destructive storm. He harvested the crop with great joy and gratitude in his heart. My Dad was a good, hard-working farmer! For our family **LIFE ITSELF** depended on a fruitful harvest. Is the challenge any different for us as Christians?

Notes on the Sunday Readings

First Reading — Exodus 3:1-8 Today's reading contains the dramatic story of young Moses and the flame-covered bush. Moses receives the mission to deliver the Israelites from bondage. God reveals his name as "I AM" (Yahweh in Hebrew); this is God's name forever, his title for all generations. God alone is the one absolute and necessary being.

Responsorial Psalm — Psalm 103:1-8, 11 This psalm expresses in beautiful ways God's tenderness and mercy; he heals all our ills, crowns us with kindness and compassion. We constantly repeat in the psalm response (and in daily life): "The Lord is kind and merciful."

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12 Here in his first letter to the Corinthians Paul gives us his teaching about Moses and Christ; he sees parallels between baptism and Christ with the Exodus and Moses. Paul reminds us to live in a cautious and prudent fashion.

Gospel — Luke 13:1-9 In today's Gospel Saint Luke describes two events and presents one of Jesus' parables. The two disastrous historical occurrences are the killing by Pilate of some Galilean Jews at the Temple and the accidental death of eighteen people in Jerusalem. The parable in the second half of the Gospel is a blunt lesson to us for Lent and for life.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who recently published [Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language](#) (Orbis Books – 2023) and [Exploring Vatican II Treasures: Actors, Events, Insights](#), commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the close of Vatican II [1965-2025] (Faith Alive Books – 2024).

Please pray for the missions.



Go Forth ... is a service funded by the Catholic Communications Campaign and USCMA, a community of faith leaders engaged in networking, formation, and advocacy for God's mission. All who serve God's mission are welcome. Learn more at www.uscatholicmission.org or call 202-832-3112.

