

# Reflection for the 3rd Sunday of Lent, Cycle C

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The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/032325-YearC.cfm>

## **1st Reading:** *Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15*

This is the story of the call of Moses. Remember the Israelites had moved to Egypt during a drought, when Joseph, their brother had become very powerful. They lived and prospered there and became so numerous that the king ordered that all the newborn boys were to be killed. To save him, Moses' mother put him in a basket and floated him in the Nile where the Pharaoh's daughter found him.

He was taken into the royal household but when he matured he saw how poorly the Israelites were being treated. He ended up killing an Egyptian who was mistreating an Israelite and fled to Midian. He met Jethro, married his daughter and worked for the family. Our selection today picks up there while Moses is tending the family's flocks.

## **2nd Reading:** *1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12*

Paul is telling the Corinthians about the Jewish wanderings in the desert and warns them not to desire evil or grumble like the desert wanderers did. It seems to me that he is likening the struggles of life in the early church to the struggles in the desert. It is actually a caution against overconfidence as you can tell by the last sentence.

## **Gospel:** *Luke 13:1-9*

He [the gardener] said to him in reply, "Sir, leave it [the fig tree] 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." Lk 13:8-9

## **Gospel Reflection**

I grew up in a small Cape Cod style brick house in Dayton, Ohio. It had a detached garage that was built later and took up the back part of our yard. In the summertime, my dad grew tomatoes along the base of the garage wall facing our house. I don't remember what other vegetables he grew but everybody knew his tomatoes.

I'm pretty sure they were called Burpee Beefsteak Tomatoes. He started them from seed in our basement and then transplanted them outside. Before they went outside, I remember he bought soil amendments from the nursery and dug up the tomato beds to mix it in. I think he even had pH test kits to get the acidity right. I don't remember so much about that, but I do remember the rabbits were his nemeses. He kept baseballs on the kitchen windowsill to throw at them. Gosh he was a good aim. They didn't have much of a chance.

I also remember that the tomatoes were big and red, had just the right amount of firmness and were juicy as could be. They were delicious and you could eat them like apples. Sometimes we took our shirts off to eat them so the juice could just run down our bellies rather than ruin a shirt.

That is what the fig tree that didn't bear fruit reminded me of. It was the opposite of my dad's tomatoes. My dad is like the gardener in the story. He cultivated the ground, and fertilized it; and, as you know if you've ever grown tomatoes, he had to pinch off the suckers to get it to bear fruit. Otherwise, they just grow leggy vines with lots of leaves. In our lives, Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, is the gardener.

If we cooperate with him... and we're talking about relationship again here... but if we cooperate with him, he will cultivate, fertilize, pinch off the suckers, and make us fruitful. That doesn't mean that he will necessarily make us productive. I think we all know how to be productive and sometimes we focus on being productive because it helps us hide from relationship. That's not cooperating with Jesus, by the way.

I think the major difference between fruitfulness and productivity is that fruitfulness is life-giving and has to do with people. Productivity most often has to do with things. Jesus is calling us to amend our ways, like using my dad's soil amendments, and become more fruitful.

I've talked about how to find God in our relationships for a couple of weeks now and I'm not going to rehash it all over again. All I want to accomplish is to encourage each of us to reflect on our own lives to see if we are being fruitful. If it doesn't appear that we are being very fruitful, let's commit to deepening our relationships... deep enough to where we can find God in them and let him, the master gardener, make us more fruitful.

Don't you want to be big and red and juicy... and tasty, like my dad's tomatoes?

God bless...

### **Personal Reflection:**

He [the gardener] said to him in reply, "Sir, leave it [the fig tree] 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." Lk 13:8-9

### **Question:**

What words or phrases attracted your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they attracted your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

### **Alternative:**

How have you experienced fruitfulness in your life? What is the difference between that and other times when you have just been productive? What would you need to change to be fruitful more often?

### **Verse by Verse:**

13:1b "...whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices." | Evidently these were Galileans who were preparing sacrifices when they were slaughtered. While this incident is not mentioned outside of the Bible, it is similar to other things Pilate had done.

Lk 13:2 "...because these Galileans suffered in this way..." | The ancient people believed that calamities were the result of sinfulness. Evidently, the worse the calamity was, the worse the sin must have been.

Lk 13:2b “Do you think... they were greater sinners than all other Galileans?” | The Greek word for sinners, here, is *hamartōlos* which means people who miss the mark, probably those who do not keep the Law as strictly as the Pharisees.

Lk 13:3b “...if you do not repent, you will all perish...!” | The Greek word used for “repent” here is *metanoia*” which literally means to change your ways.

Lk 13:6,7 “And he told them this parable...” | The parable gives meaning to the preceding. The sin of the people, whom Jesus is calling to change their ways, is not doing what they were created to do; not bearing fruit. AYBC points out that the fig tree is often used in Hebrew Scripture to symbolize Judah or Israel.

Lk 13:8,9 “ He (the gardener) said to him in reply, ‘Sir, leave it for this year also...’ | I take the gardener to represent Jesus, our advocate, and the year to be Jesus’ time. Remember, this time is extended by the gift of the new advocate, the Holy Spirit, after Jesus’ Ascension.