

The 3rd Sunday of Lent Year C – 3/23/2025 – Msgr. Peter Quang Nguyen

- **First Reading** – Exodus 3:1-8A, 13-15: Moses encounters God in a burning bush at Horeb. Instructed to remove his sandals on holy ground, he is tasked to rescue Israelites from Egypt, armed with God’s name, “I AM.” God declared His intention of using Moses as the leader who would rescue His enslaved people.
- **Responsorial Psalm** – Psalm 103: The Psalmist reminds us of God’s mercy: *“He pardons all your iniquities; He heals all your ills. He redeems your life from destruction ... Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger and abounding in kindness.”*
- **Second Reading** – 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12: Our forefathers, guided by a cloud and sea, were baptized into Moses, shared spiritual sustenance, and drank from Christ, the spiritual rock. St. Paul warns us that our merciful God is also a disciplining God. Their failures in the wilderness warn us against evil cravings and complacency.
- **Gospel** – Luke 13:1-9: The Gospel emphasizes the Christian call to *metanoia*, (=conversion, repentance, and inner change), and heartens us with the reality of God’s patient mercy.

A Joke: Pastor’s temptation and policeman’s forgiveness:

In a large city, a priest parked his car in a no-parking zone because he couldn’t find a metered space. He put a note under the windshield wiper that read: *“I have circled the block 100 times. If I don’t park here, I’ll miss my appointment. **Forgive us our trespasses.**”* When he returned, he found a citation from a police officer along with this note: *“I’ve circled this block for 10 years. If I don’t give you a ticket, I’ll lose my job. **Lead us not into temptation.**”*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

All three of today’s readings speak of God’s mercy and compassion in disciplining His children by occasional punishment, while giving them many “second chances” despite their repeated sins. Although God’s love for us is constant and consistent, He will not save us without our co-operation. That is why He invites us during Lent to repent of our sins and to renew our lives by producing good fruits.

Three kinds of tragedies are mentioned in today’s Gospel: 1) Human tragedy caused by evil people; 2) Natural tragedy caused by accidents or natural events; 3) the Greatest tragedy is of eternal separation from God in hell.

We are called to live lives of repentance, because:

- We never know when we will meet a tragedy of our own. Let us repent while we have the chance. Let us turn to Christ, acknowledge our faults and failings, and receive from him mercy, forgiveness, and the promise of eternal life. There is no better way to take these words of Jesus to heart than to go to sacramental confession, and there is no better time to go to confession than during Lent. We are unable to predict when a tragic accident may happen to us. Our end may come swiftly – without warning and without giving us an opportunity to repent. Also, repentance helps us in life and in death. It helps us to live as forgiven people and helps us to face death without fear. When we repent, we are saying: *“I’ve been going in the wrong direction – I must turn my life around.”* Repentance begins with an admission of our sin and inadequacy. Scripture says repentance results in forgiveness, renewal, and redirection. Repentance is a statement of regret for the inner condition of our souls, with a determination to have that condition changed.

The Jewish concept of repentance at Jesus' time:

- **Teshuvá** was the key concept in the rabbinic view of sin, repentance, and forgiveness. The Jewish rabbis taught that repentance required five elements:
 - *recognition* of one's sin as sin;
 - *remorse* for having committed the sin;
 - *desisting* from repeating this sin;
 - *restitution* for the damage done by the sin where possible; and
 - *confession*. "Confession" for the Jews had two forms: ritual and personal.

Ritual confession required recitation of the liturgies of confession at their proper moments in the prayer life of the community.

Personal confession required individual confession before God as needed or inserting one's personal confession into the liturgy at designated moments. One who followed these steps to *teshuvá* was called a "penitent." In fact, Jesus invited his Jewish listeners to such repentance.

- "**Metanoia**" (Greek, *metanoia*), repent implies not just regret for the past but a radical conversion and a complete change in our way of life as we respond and open ourselves to the love of God. Repentance, or a turning away from one path to another, is not so much finding God as being found by God. Jesus calls us today to "repentance" – not a one-time change of heart, but an ongoing, daily transformation of our lives. In one of his letters, Thomas Merton wrote, "*We are not converted only once in our lives, but many times; and this endless series of large and small conversions, inner revolutions, leads to our transformation in Christ.*"

We need to be fruitful trees in God's orchard. Lent is an ideal time "*to dig around and manure*" the tree of our life so that it may bring forth fruits. The "*fruits*" God expects from us during Lent are repentance, renewal of life, and the resulting virtues of love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, selflessness, and humble service. Let us start producing these fruits *in the family* by becoming more sensitive to the feelings of others and by accepting each member of the family with love and respect. The Christian fruits of reconciliation will grow in the family when each member shows good will by forgiving others and by asking their forgiveness. We become fruit-bearing in the community by caring for the poor, the sick, the little ones, the old, and the lonely.

We need to make the best use of the "second chances" God gives us. Our merciful Father always gives us a second chance. The prodigal son, returning to the father, was welcomed as a son, not treated as a slave. The repentant Peter was made the head of the Church. The persecutor Saul was made Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. During Lent, we, too, are given another chance to repent and return to our Heavenly Father's love. We are also expected to give others another chance when they ask our forgiveness. God would like to use each one of us as the "gardener" in the parable to help Him cultivate our families and communities and enrich them with grace. Let us thank God for using others to help us bear fruit. *Grace is everywhere.* Let us always cooperate with grace, especially during Lent.

Lord, help us to thank you for using circumstances and other people to help us bear fruit. May we cooperate with your grace during this Holy Lent. Amen.