

3rd Sunday of Lent

March 19, 2022

Prayer for Reading 1:

God of our fathers, you have beckoned us and have never pushed us away. Our land could flow with milk and honey! Chance upon chance you give us, grace upon grace. And then you stand by, awaiting our words...“Here I am, Lord.” Help us to taste your saving love and come running to you.

Reading I:

[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.”

Holy Spirit, give us just one more span of days. Please stretch open our hearts in them. Let your patient grace come to live in us.

Reading II: **[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.

Questions for Reading 2:

1. Do you have to work at keeping a friendship alive and healthy? Does the same hold true for your relationship with God?
2. Are there opportunities for deeper conversion (turning more toward God) and productivity that you could take advantage of? Are there some opportunities for your parish too?

Prayer for Gospel:

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.

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.’”

Questions for Gospel:

1. “ ... And I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it;” ... Metaphorically speaking, the cultivation and fertilization could be grace in the parable. In the book [Diary of a Country Priest](#), George Bernanos said, “Grace is everywhere.” What does that statement mean to you? Do you always cooperate with such grace? Could you cooperate to a greater degree? How?
2. Do you give people another chance after they make a mistake? 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?

In Exile by Ron Rolheiser

Prayer

In her masterful book, [Guidelines for Mystical Prayer](#), Ruth Burrows has a section within which she lists the faults of those who are beyond initial conversion. What are these faults?

Burrows has her own list, what I offer here is the perspective that Henri Nouwen gives in his spiritual masterpiece, [The Return of the Prodigal Son](#). Among many things in that book, Nouwen tells us that as persons who understand ourselves as already committed, we still need to make a three-fold conversion movement: 1) We need to move from being a bystander to being a participant; 2) from being a judge to being a repentant sinner; and 3) from speaking about love to actually letting ourselves be loved. What is involved in each of these?

From being a bystander to being a participant: in essence, what we need to do here is to move from studying life, speaking about it, teaching about it, writing about it, and perhaps even at times mimicking it, to actually living it. I know this sounds very much like a cliché devoid of substance, but a lot of what is wrong in the world, the church, and within our personal lives today is precisely the fact that we study things, talk about them, strongly voice our convictions about them, but often, in fact, do little or nothing about them. For example, we do not lack for literature, moral rhetoric, or good analysis on social justice. But there is, in fact, very, very little being done. This is not so much because our passion for justice is insincere, but because at the end of the day we are bystanders not participants.

The same holds true for prayer. There is no shortage of literature in this area (and no shortage of workshops either). We talk enough about prayer. We just don't pray a lot. In terms of deep private prayer, we pray very little. Again, we are much more in the position of the bystander than participant. [Therese of Lisieux](#) once wrote: "I always preferred to pray rather than to have spiritual conversations about prayer." For most of us, the opposite is true.

[Robert Moore](#) suggests that this failure to move from bystander to participant is a disease that particularly afflicts those among us who do any kind of ministry or are in any teaching or healing profession. Invariably we end up studying life and speaking about it rather than living it. It is no accident that those of us in these vocations frequently feel anger towards anyone who actually does anything. It will also be no accident that when the last tree on the planet has been cut down there will have been libraries of studies written about the ill effect of cutting down trees, but very little will have been done by a way of action by those who wrote all those books.

We generally respond to the issue of violence against children and women in the same way—with yet another study. We are too much bystanders, not participants.

We must also move from being judge to being repentant sinner. What is meant by this? All of us pray the prayer of the Pharisee—“thank God that I’m not like that other person!” We are all self-righteous, it is only a question of what we are self-righteous about.

We used to stereotype self-righteousness in one phrase: “holier-than-thou.” We are all “holier-than-thou,” except we each define holiness according to our own idiosyncratic preference, that is, as “more-sensitive-than-thou,” “brighter-than-thou,” “less hypocritical-than-thou,” “more-experienced-than-thou,” “less-bigoted- than-thou,” “less rigid-than-thou,” or “more-of-a-victim-than-thou.” In subtle and not so subtle ways, each of us is more judge than repentant sinner.

We stop being a judge only when we claim our proper place among the broken, among God's little ones, the unfaithful, sinners. Only when we watch the news at night and recognize that every pathology, every act of violence, and every sin we see on our television screen is also inside of us will we lose all interest in making comparisons and be content to let God's grace simply work in us.

Finally, we must move from speaking about love to actually letting ourselves be loved. Nouwen uses his own life as an example. For years, he went all over the world giving talks about love, even while not letting those around him really love him. Only after moving in with the physically handicapped, with people who were not interested in what he had to say about love, did he actually allow himself to be loved. What was true for him is true for most of us. It is far easier for us to speak about love than to let ourselves actually be loved.

Those around us, family and friends, already know all these things about us. It's time we recognized them too.

<http://liturgy.slu.edu/index.html>

(main site from which the Bible study is composed)