

Don't Have Too Much Confidence!
Luke 13:1-9
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Homily 147 Fig Tree 3rd Lent
Ex 3:1-8, 1 Cor 10:1-6

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

Joshua was 11 years old. One Sunday, as they left church he asked his mom Rebecca to explain the story of the fig tree that was read at Mass. "What do you think Joshua?" "Well," he said, "why didn't it bear fruit? It seemed that it was given everything it needed by the farmer. It got a lot of attention". "That's very good Joshua," his mother responded, "you were really listening". You see Jesus told that story, that parable, to remind the disciples that we are given everything by our Father, that is God, but many, like the fig tree don't bear fruit, they don't do good things. They take advantage of all they are given and don't share it with others. The little fig tree was selfish; it did not want to share. It just wanted to take advantage of the nourishment it receives to have great leaves and bark and show off in the vineyard. It took up space in the vineyard and didn't give anything back. Perhaps, on the other hand, it was even scared that if it did bear fruit people would pick the fruit or the fruit would be rotten then people would make fun of the tree for not being successful. "How do you think that relates to you Joshua?" "Well it is like have the lunches you make for me to take to school and not share it with someone who doesn't have one. Or maybe it is like ignoring someone in the class because others ignore them". "That's right Joshua, the fig tree did not share and Jesus was saying that we need to share the gift we receive, we cannot just take up space in this world thinking there we be space in the next. In a sense we earn the space by producing good fruit from all that God has given us".

So what is the theme of today's readings? We cannot continue to pretend we are seeking a close relationship with Christ if all we want is the pleasure of this world. If all we want is a happy little life with no sacrifice. God has patience, but eventually our time runs out; we run out of time in this life to bare fruit. You see, to bear fruit is to act out our faith in life. The Palestinian fig trees bears fruit ten months of the year. Which means we should expect fruit most of the time. The tree is given three years to grow after planting. For the next tree years the fruit is considered forbidden. The fruit in the seventh year is considered ready to offer to the Lord. (Lev. 19). The owner who lives in the city asks the tenant farmer why the tree has had three years, but no fruit for the Lord. If our math is correct the tree just turned nine years old. Now, that is patience. That's it, the landowner says, root it up, its life is over. It has run out of time, but Jesus the gardener urges mercy from the landowner to give the tree another chance. In true Mediterranean style, the gardener resorts to humor. "Well I will just throw some manure on the roots then we will see what it does". Those listening would have laughed at this. You see Jesus was humorous. How many of us would say that we have experience manure in our lives, in other words we have received signs that we should repent and be saved? But we use a work in our tradition, accident. We call such things accident. Jesus call them signs.

Aquinas says there is a cause and effect. We don't bear fruit, so we get manure, aka. consequences. It is also interesting to note that the Aramaic word for 'dig it out' vs. 'let it alone' are the same word for 'no mercy' vs. 'forgiveness'. God is a patient and forgiving God, as demonstrated in Jesus the vineyard gardener, but there is day of atonement, there is a day when out time to repent and be saved as Act 2:38 states.

The same theme permeates the first reading from Exodus 3. The bush is on fire, but it is not burning. Wake up Moses! Quit ignoring your call to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land. There is a reason Promised Land is spelled with capitals. In the second reading from Corinthians, "these happens...have been written down as a warning to us." These readings in the middle of lent are a WAKE UP CALL. It's not too late yet to wake up to Jesus. We all get wake up calls, could be a person we encounter, could be a reflection in the midst of prayer, could be a situation that did not seem to make sense in terms of our life.

So what should we do as a result of these reading in our life? First, think about our beliefs and our behavior. Is our behavior in line with our faith, our beliefs? We seek a relationship with Jesus but we are unwilling to endure frustration, we are unwilling to sacrifice. We say we believe, but we seek unsuccessfully to live a life of pleasure. We reject sacrifice as a way of Christian life; think about it...Beliefs - Behavior. This is a critical truth. As you believe so you act. Or as you act so you must believe. No one is a pretender for long. If you say one thing and do another are you not an imposter? If I truly love you, but judge you do I truly love you? Does not true love demand not to judge? If I love Jesus and want a relationship with him my behavior would demonstrate it. Luke 7:16 says "by the fruit you will know them".

Second, act to strengthen your belief. It is easier at times to act your way into believing than to think your way into acting. For example, if you don't pray how can we strengthen our belief, for Jesus sought to pray so that he could not the Father more deeply? It is not in prayer that we encounter Christ, but it is in prayer that we come to recognize Christ in our life. The act of prayer helps us hear Him knocking so that we open the door.

Third, as Peter Chysologus Doctor of the Church archdeacon, referred to as the Doctor of Homilies, from his desire not to bore the congregation preached, "We find eternal life through prayer, sacrifice, forgiveness, and mercy. Through prayer we knock, through sacrifice we receive, and through forgiveness of other we are forgiven. No one of them can exist without the other; prayer without sacrifice fails, prayer and sacrifice without forgiveness fall short of a relationship with Christ, for if we cannot forgive we cannot love. Jesus came to wake us up to love and forgiveness to bring us to belief and behavior. Wake Up.

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