

Homily – Lk. 13: 1-9

3rd Sunday of Lent - Year C, 20th March 2022

In his memoirs, Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Indian nation, humbly and frankly acknowledges that, when he was fifteen, he stole a little piece of gold from his brother. A few days later, he felt very guilty and decided to come clean by confessing his mistake to his father. So, he took a sheet of paper, wrote down his fault, sincerely asked his father for forgiveness and promised never to repeat the offence. Now, taking that note to the bedroom of his father, young Gandhi very timidly handed it to him without saying a word. His father sat up in bed and began reading the note. As he read it, the senior Gandhi was so deeply moved by the honesty, sincerity and courage of his son that tears began to stream from his eyes. This so touched the son that he burst into tears as well. Instinctively both father and son wrapped their arms around each other and wordlessly shared their mutual admiration and joy. This notable experience made such a deep impact on Gandhi that years later he would say, “Only a person who has experienced this kind of forgiving love can know what it really is.” – Well, such is God’s merciful forgiveness and benevolent love for all who resolutely turn over a new leaf, especially during this Lenten season.

The Readings of today speak of God's mercy and compassion in disciplining His children by occasional punishments, while giving them many "second chances" despite their repeated sins. But although God's love for us is definitely constant and consistent, He needs our co-operation, in order, that we grow in grace and become more Christ like day by day. And that is the reason, why He invites us during this Lent to repent of our sins and to renew our lives by producing fruits of love, compassion, forgiveness, and faithful service.

On this Third Sunday of Lent, the Church presents before us in the Gospel of Luke, the image of the barren fig tree which is a summons to repentance. And today, Jesus warns His listeners not to spend their time speculating about the guilt of others, but to concentrate on examining their own lives, and their own need for repentance and forgiveness.

And if we go deeper, the image of the barren fig tree is in fact a parable of Divine Patience. Through this parable, we are reminded of the patience of a God, who is willing to give us chance after chance to reform our lives and to seek reconciliation. Even when we waste or refuse those chances, God in His mercy, allows us still more opportunities to repent. And, just as the farmer tended the barren fig tree with special care, God affords

us whatever graces we need, to leave our sinful ways behind and return to God's love.

Story is told of a young corporate executive named Bill who gave in to temptation and was discovered as being guilty of misappropriation of funds placed in his trust. Bill was called into the office of the company president John. He feared the worst. John then asked him, "Bill, did you, do it?" Bill ducked his head in embarrassment and muttered, "Yes, sir, I did it." Mr. John continued, "You made a bad decision Bill. And I suppose you realize it. You are the second one in this room who made a bad choice. Thirty years ago, I did the same thing you did, and a very kind and forgiving man then gave me another chance. Now, I too am going to give you the mercy and grace that I received that day. Now get to work." Hearing this, Bill was stunned. Quietly, he left the office laden with gratitude and unforgettable relief.

Well dear friends, God gives us what we often do not deserve. Whenever we commit sins, He forgives us and He gives us another chance, for "the Lord is loving, compassionate, kind, and merciful."

And today, God invites you and me to use the second chance we get appropriately to renew, to return and to revitalize our lives. And those moments in which we go

astray, God waits and hopes that we would return to Him and bear solid fruits in the future. And in our efforts and on our journey, we are never alone. God walks with us all our way.

And that is exactly what God is telling us in the book of Exodus when He reveals Himself to Moses as: “I am, who am”. According to Cardinal Walter Casper, a German Theologian, the best way to translate the name of God in the book of Exodus is this: God’s name is not just I am who am. But rather, God’s name is I am the one who is here for you’. In other words, Cardinal Casper says: God’s name spoken from the burning bush is: I am here for you. And if we turn the pages of the Bible, we would see that God is true to His name consistently, no matter what happens to God’s people, no matter what sins they commit, no matter what prayer they pray, God’s answer is always the same. I am here for you.

Yes! God is always there for us and we are never alone. But now the question is: are we there for our brothers and sisters who are in need of our help? Is there a family member living under my roof who needs a second chance? May be, many people we meet in our day-to-day life are struggling with all sorts of burdens: some of them needing a listening ear, or some of them needing a

shoulder to lean on. In what way do I help cultivate, nourish, nurture and make others bear fruit?

Dear brothers and sisters, there are so many people in our world today who need hope and help. And God may not have to set a bush ablaze. But God wants to set you and me ablaze with His love. And God wants to send you and me 'to help our neighbour so that everyone will know what we know', that our help comes from Jesus Christ who says to us in this Eucharist: 'Repent, come back, I am here for you'.

God bless you all, **Amen.**