

3rd Sunday of Lent C; Ex 3:1-8, 13-15; 1 Cor 10:1-6.10-12; Lk 13:1-9

Rhythms of self-discipline and the three fold disciplines of lent, prayer, fasting and almsgiving help the Christian to the integration of our lives into the paschal mystery, that is, death and resurrection of Jesus. Our focus on worship in lent is that of reorientation, a change of heart. As Cardinal Newman says, to grow is to change and to have grown is to have changed many times. This season calls for a readjustment and a self-evaluation that helps us refocus. Pope John Paul II demonstrated this when he wrote a very moving Lenten pastoral in which he apologized for what he referred to as the exaggerated zeal of the sons and daughters of the Church. That is precisely the invitation of today's Mass.

When people fail to notice us or when people no longer have time for us, we begin to wonder about the quality of their love. It is difficult to ignore people and still claim to love them at the same time. This makes awareness and care very fundamental virtue because they are the preconditions for authentic and credible love. We can't love people we do not even notice. Love presupposes awareness, it is a decision to become interested in somebody or something and to actually reach out to do something for or in favor of that which is loved. Because we care for people, we pay attention to what goes on in their lives.

It is important to our faith to believe that God actually cares enough to notice what goes on in our lives. God is not emotionally sterile. The story of our first reading tells of God revealing himself to Moses and showing his deepest care and concern for the affliction and the adversity that his people Israel were passing through in Egypt. This text presents God as one who notices, one who cares, one who is not indifferent to our human condition here on earth. The Psalm we had this morning also affirms this. It tells us that our God cares. Our God is capable of being reached because he is capable of being moved to pity and to action. In our first reading, Moses is chosen to give voice to God's care for his oppressed people. He typifies God's care in motion.

The role of Moses prefigures the role of Jesus. Through Moses, God saved his people from slavery to enduring freedom. We are the new people of God saved through the waters of baptism.

The first point to note today is that God cares and notices. He is not indifferent but actively involved in human affairs. We are all invited to care deeply and to get involved with one another. Some people are too enclosed that they appear incapable of being moved to pity. Sometimes you wonder if they have feelings at all. According to Ferder, God is not a Slipshod potter who didn't notice that feelings were creeping into humanity at the dawn of creation. If human emotions were bad and sinful, why did Jesus himself have emotions and human feelings? He not only had feelings and emotions but he expressed them quite openly:

He felt sorry and had compassion on people [Lk 7:13]; He was moved with pity [Mk 1:41]; He was sorrowful and troubled [Mt 26:37]; He looked down at them with anger [Mk 3:5]; He was indignant [Mk 10:14]; He was filled with joy [Lk 10:21]; He was astonished [Mt 8:10]; He loved: "And Jesus looking upon him, loved [Mt 10:21]. Jesus wept [Jn 11:35]; Being fully human is not incompatible with being fully divine. Fran Ferder, sums it up lovingly: "Jesus knew the pains and disappointment

of rejection, the agony of sadness. He experienced the kind of longing that gnaws at the stomach and pulls in the heart. At times, it moved him to tears, wet and salty expression of feelings. He churned with anger, struggled with impatience, and cherished moments of joy and excitement. His pulse quickened with compassion and his face mellowed in tenderness. He knew love. It was not an emotionally frozen messiah who gathered a band of followers and called them friends. It was not a sterile God keeping a distance who wandered over the Galilean countryside with women and men together. It was not an over-controlled redeemer who begged for companionship and perspired in agony during his last hours" [F. Ferder. P. 51-52]. This could be a growth point for us this lent.

The second point to take home today is that of patience. The God of the gospel is called the God of the second chance. The history of the church is filled up with stories of sinners who became saints. We need to be patient with one another. God is infinitely patient with us. Let us not write one another off. Let us not send one another to a lost property garage or garbage heap. God has not finished with any of us. Albert Einstein was arguably the greatest mind of the twentieth century, yet he didn't learn to talk until he was two. In school, one of his teachers was so disappointed with him that he said 'you will never amount to anything'. His parents and teachers judged him too soon. Some people are slow and a bit late but are all the better for it. Patience is needed in every aspect of life, whether married or single, whether in relationship or not. I had a friend who all too easily gets crossed and one could see him beginning to steam like a tea kettle before boiling. I would see him getting angry and I would scream out 'Michael, patience is a virtue and he would instantly retort 'Innocent, I don't have it, I don't have it, I don't have it'. Another lovely couple had a wonderful and humorous way of expressing their struggle at patience. When I had the privilege of celebrating their golden jubilee anniversary, I asked the man to tell me how he has managed to be patient with Mary and stick out to her all those years, he said to me 'Father the day I married Mary, I knew I had all my penance done'. I asked Mary to tell me if she ever thought of divorce these fifty years. She shook her head and said nooooooh, but murder.