

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT – 23 MARCH 2025



COLLECT

O God, author of every mercy and of all goodness,
who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving
have shown us a remedy for sin,
look graciously on this confession of our lowliness,
that we, who are bowed down by our conscience,
may always be lifted up by your mercy.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS

The dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well explores the rich symbol of water and has for centuries been used in connection with Christian initiation. It is assigned to the Third Sunday of Lent in Year A but can always be chosen for this Sunday, especially if there are adults to be initiated at Easter. Year A texts are found at the end of the book.

In today's gospel for Year C, Jesus refers to several disasters and calls for the people to repent. Whenever we click onto the news, we are bombarded with stories and images of disasters – the big events such as war, right down to local tragedies such as a stabbing or a hit-and-run. Reflection on these events brings us to a realisation of the fragility of life and the need to set our lives in order. This is exactly the Lenten call to conversion of heart and repentance. It all takes place within the framework of God's mercy and compassion.

A reading from the book of Exodus 3:1–8, 13–15

Moses was looking after the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, priest of Midian. He led his flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in the shape of a flame of fire, coming from the middle of a bush. Moses looked; there was the bush blazing but it was not being burnt up. 'I must go and look at this strange sight,' Moses said 'and see why the bush is not burnt.' Now the Lord saw him go forward to look, and God called to him from the middle of the bush. 'Moses, Moses!' he said. 'Here I am,' he answered. 'Come no nearer,' he said. 'Take off your shoes, for the place on which you stand is holy ground. I am the God of your father,' he said 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' At this Moses covered his face, afraid to look at God. And the Lord said, 'I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slavedrivers. Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings. I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land to a land rich and broad, a land where milk and honey flow.' Then Moses said to God, 'I am to go, then, to the sons of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you." But if they ask me what his name is, what am I to tell them?' And God said to Moses, 'I Am who I Am. This' he added 'is what you must say to the sons of Israel: "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is my name for all time; by this name I shall be invoked for all generations to come.'

Responsorial Psalm Ps 102:1–4, 6–8, 11

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

My soul, give thanks to the Lord,
all my being, bless his holy name.

My soul give thanks to the Lord
and never forget all his blessings. **R.**

It is he who forgives all your guilt,
who heals every one of your ills,
who redeems your life from the grave,
who crowns you with love and compassion. **R.**

The Lord does deeds of justice,
gives judgement for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses
and his deeds to Israel's sons. **R.**

The Lord is compassion and love,
slow to anger and rich in mercy.
For as the heavens are high above the earth
so strong is his love for those who fear him. **R.**

First Reading

Moses was born under an oppressive regime in Egypt. Hidden in a basket in the reeds by a river, he was found and given protection by the Pharaoh's daughter. As an adult, he was caught up in the persecution and he fled across the border to the north-east. He ends up as a shepherd and it is here that he has an extraordinary experience of the sacred.

He encounters God in the mysterious burning bush. He takes off his shoes and covers his face. The God who is revealed to him is, as the psalm will say, 'compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy'. God has seen the sufferings of the chosen people and wants to deliver them from oppression and slavery.

Then comes the crunch for Moses. God is sending him back to Egypt to liberate the people and to bring them to the proverbial 'land of milk and honey'. (We will hear the story of how Moses leads them across the Red Sea at the Easter Vigil.)

The one who proclaims this text needs to convey the full drama of this event. It is important to convey a sense of reverence and awe as Moses encounters the burning bush. The Lord's concern for the misery of the people enslaved in Egypt should be read with a wonderful warmth and love. The final paragraph will convey both Moses' determination and his nervousness in responding to God's commission.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 102/103 is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving in honour of God's goodness. It refers to Moses and the revelation of God's compassion for those who suffer; we hear of justice for the oppressed which we encountered in the first reading.

The first two verses are more personal but then the horizon expands to include the whole people. Together and individually, we are blessed by our God who is 'kind and merciful'.

The psalm offers strong hope for all those who are disadvantaged or oppressed. This sets the tone for the cantor/reader who proclaims it.

**A reading from the first letter of St Paul
to the Corinthians 10:1–6, 10–12**

I want to remind you how our fathers were all guided by a cloud above them and how they all passed through the sea. They were all baptised into Moses in this cloud and in this sea; all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink, since they all drank from the spiritual rock that followed them as they went, and that rock was Christ. In spite of this, most of them failed to please God and their corpses littered the desert.

These things all happened as warnings for us, not to have the wicked lusts for forbidden things that they had. You must never complain: some of them did, and they were killed by the Destroyer.

All this happened to them as a warning, and it was written down to be a lesson for us who are living at the end of the age. The man who thinks he is safe must be careful that he does not fall.

**A reading from the holy Gospel
according to Luke 13:1–9**

Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them?

Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.'

He told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came looking for fruit on it but found none.

He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, "Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down."

Second Reading

Following on from the story of Moses in the first reading, this text from Paul again makes use of the figure of Moses, but this time taking the period after the Exodus when the people spend forty years in the desert. Paul reminds the Church at Corinth of God's gifts to their ancestors: they were led through the Red Sea, guided by a cloud, fed with manna and provided with water from the rock. He links these with baptism, Eucharist and Christ.

Paul wants to combat their competitiveness and their pride in their gifts by encouraging thankfulness to God. He refers to the destructive errors and complaints of the people of the exodus and uses it as a warning. We need to trust in God and rely on God's mercy.

There are some strong negative words in this text (corpses littering the desert, wicked lusts for forbidden things, killed by the Destroyer). However, the aim of the reading is positive, and the reader should try to encourage the listeners to trust in God, to repent and to show gratitude.

Gospel

This gospel text falls clearly into two parts.

Part one refers to two calamities: first, a massacre by Pilate the Roman provincial governor, and second the collapse of a tower which killed eighteen people. Jesus uses these current events to call the people to repent. There is a strong rhetorical force in the repetition, *Do you suppose... unless you repent...* This is a restatement of a key Lenten theme and, by the way, offers us a way to interpret news events in our own day, a technique from which the homilist could well learn.

Part two recounts the parable of the fig tree without figs. It counters the rather threatening phrase in Jesus' call to repentance: *you will all perish...* It is a parable about God's endless patience and the constant offer of a second chance. Thus, it reinforces the message of the first reading and psalm: *The ways of God are just; God is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy.*

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Prayer over the People (Third Sunday of Lent)

Direct, O Lord, we pray, the hearts of your faithful,
and in your kindness grant your servants this grace:
that, abiding in the love of you and their neighbour,
they may fulfil the whole of your commands.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
come down on us and remain with us for ever.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Prayer over the People for the Third Sunday of Lent, Roman Missal p. 262)

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of Exodus 3:1–8, 13–15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro,
the priest of Midian;
he led his flock beyond the wilderness,
and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.
There the angel of the Lord appeared to him
in a flame of fire out of a bush;
Moses looked, and the bush was blazing,
yet it was not consumed.

Then Moses said,
“I must turn aside and look at this great sight,
and see why the bush is not burned up.”

When the Lord saw that Moses had turned aside to see,
God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!”
And Moses said, “Here I am.”
Then God said, “Come no closer!
Remove the sandals from your feet,
for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

God said further; “I am the God of your father,
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”
And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said,
“I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt;
I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters.
Indeed, I know their sufferings,
and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians,
and to bring them up out of that land
to a good and broad land,
a land flowing with milk and honey.

“But Moses said to God,
“If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘
‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’
and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’
what shall I say to them?”

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.”
He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites,
‘I AM has sent me to you.

God also said to Moses,
'Thus you shall say to the Israelites,
'The Lord, the God of your ancestors,
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac,
and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.
This is my name forever;
and this my title for all generations.'"

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (NRSV)

Psalm 103.1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8+11 (R.8a)

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits. **R.**

It is the Lord who forgives all your iniquity,
heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
and crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. **R.**

The Lord works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel. **R.**

The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him. **R.**

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians 10:1–6, 10–12

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,
that our ancestors were all under the cloud;
all passed through the sea;
all 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 the spiritual rock that followed them,
and the rock was Christ.

Nevertheless, God was not pleased
with most of our ancestors,
and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Now these things occurred as examples for us,
so that we might not desire evil as they did.
And do not complain as some of them did,
and were destroyed by the destroyer.

These things happened to our ancestors
to serve as an example,
and they were written down to instruct us,
on whom the ends of the ages have come.
So if you think you are standing,
watch out that you do not fall.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the gospel according to Luke 13:1–9

Jesus was teaching the crowds;
some of those present told Jesus about the Galileans
whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

Jesus asked them,
“Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way
they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?
No, I tell you;
but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.
Or those eighteen who were killed
when the tower of Siloam fell on them,
do you think that they were worse offenders
than all the others living in Jerusalem?
No, I tell you;
but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

Then Jesus told this parable:

“A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard;
and he came looking for fruit on it and found none.
So he said to the gardener, ‘See here!
For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree,
and still I find none.
Cut it down!
Why should it be wasting the soil?’

The gardener replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year,
until I dig around it and put manure on it.
If it bears fruit next year, well and good;
but if not, you can cut it down.’