

Homily. 3rd Sunday of Lent. Year.C. 23/24 March 2019.

Moses was born of a Hebrew couple in Egypt. He was saved from the River Nile by one of Pharaoh's wives and brought up as a Prince of Egypt. As a young man he came to know of his rescue from the waters and that he was of Hebrew ancestry thereby a slave according to his race. Seeing the harsh treatment the Egyptians were dealing out to his native people he struck and killed one of them, fleeing for his life to reside in the silence of the desert. There he married a Midianite woman, the daughter of Jethro, taking up their nomadic hoarding life style.

Our 1st reading begins at this point with Moses looking after the sheep of Jethro's flock. Approaching the burning bush that wasn't consumed by its inner fire Moses came upon holy ground. He met the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, his ancestors in faith. He was commissioned, despite his personal doubts and limitations, to go and speak God's freedom word to mighty Pharaoh. The strange name God gave; I am who I am, is best understood as a verb meaning something like; I am with you and you will come to know me by what I do for you and my people. Believing this required faith from Moses, that what God had said is true. It meant choosing to walk daily through fears and joys with God at his side.

The gospel of Luke makes the point that sudden and unjust events do befall blameless people; that illness and tragedy are not directly linked to the living of a bad, evil or godless life. People are murdered even by governments and regimes, buildings do fail, crushing the innocent.

It's very neat, tying up lots of our loose ends, to think that bad things happen to bad people who deserve what they get and that good things happen to those who earn and deserve such blessings. It's neat thinking, but as Jesus pointed out, it's utterly false to imagine reality in this way. After all, none could have been more innocent and deserving of goodness and blessings than Jesus Himself. Yet, we need look no further than His Cross to see what happened to Him, to understand what we did to Him!

The fruitless fig tree deserved to be cut down, having given nothing for 3 years, but at the pleading of the gardener it was granted more time and chances to produce its fruit. Jesus is that gardener, interceding for us, winning us time and mercy so that we come around to God's ways, producing the fruits of goodness, kindness, justice and integrity. Lent is our season, our holy time, granting us the patience and mercy we need.

When Moses went back to Egypt, back to his own enslaved people he said to Pharaoh that he had to Let God's people go! As we know, Pharaoh refused. God was patient, not rushing into destruction nor hasty in cutting Pharaoh and the Egyptians down to size. Patience and mercy was God's response to Pharaoh's hardness of heart. 10 plagues followed, each one worse than before, with Moses pleading after each disaster for the Hebrews be set free. Sadly, it was only with the last and worst plague, the death of the 1st born, that mighty Pharaoh relented. Even so, as the people were escaping, Pharaoh again became proud and stubborn. He set out with his army and chariots to corner them at the Sea, aiming to deal them death and further enslavement. This last act of arrogance led

to the final destruction of Pharaoh's power with God acting to save the people through the might parting of the waters.

The waters saved the baby Moses when he was plucked to life from the reed banks of the flowing river. The waters dealt a final death to the murderous, arrogant plans of Pharaoh. It was through these same parted waters that the people escaped to freedom, beginning their long desert journey of purification leading to a home they could call their own.

Mercy, patient kindness and healing justice for our fragile humanity is the saving water we need rained upon us today, both from God and each other. Remember, people are still too often callously killed; disasters do befall each of us to a greater or lesser extent regardless of our way of living. Know too, that all of us have failed to produce what God wants, deserving to be cut down and tossed aside like the fruitless fig tree.

Instead, what we receive is God's grace and the gifts of patience and wisdom from our caring gardener who stands up for us tending to our needs, so that we might come into fruitfulness. As we sang in the Psalm, our Lord is always kind and merciful. In the end though, it's our choice to decide between the way of Pharaoh or the way of Moses. That's our freedom which God always respects. I hope and pray with you that during this Lent we all choose wisely and well so that we can come to bear the fruit of Christ in our lives for the betterment of many.