

Commentary to the 3rd Sunday of Lent (C)



3rd Lent: Bear Fruit Now!

Today, I'm going to start by talking about procrastination. Actually, I was going to talk about this last week, but I put it off. Some people are world class procrastinators. They even have their own club. The club hasn't met yet, but they are planning on it.

Let's start with a somewhat typical family dialogue.

Mom: "Did you finish your science project yet?"

Frank: "It's not due for another two weeks, Mom."

Mom: "Have you finished it yet?"

Frank: "I've got another week, Mom."

Mom: "Don't tell me you haven't even started the science project yet. Isn't it due this Friday?"

Frank: “It’s OK, Mom. I always work better under pressure.”

Frank: “Excuse me, Mr. Crabapple. Can I get an extension on my science project? I had the flu yesterday.”

And so the drama of procrastination plays out. And Teens, if you think you are the only ones who procrastinate, ask your parents if they finished their taxes yet, or when they finished them last year. On second thought, don’t.....life will be a lot easier for you.

When we procrastinate, we put pressure on ourselves to complete a task at the last minute. We are also assuming that nothing will happen to prevent our finishing, or even starting our work.

Life, though, often throws monkey wrenches into our plans. As a result, we often never get around to it.

That is what happened in the case of the two events Jesus mentions in today’s Gospel. Eighteen people were killed when a tower in Siloam fell on them. A large number of people from Gallilee, we don’t know how many, were killed by Pilate’s soldiers during a temple service. All had plans for their lives. All of their lives came to a sudden end with their plans unfulfilled.

Jesus’ mentions these tragedies as an introduction to his parable about procrastination. The farmer has a fig tree that hasn’t born any fruit for three years. He was going to cut it down, but the gardener convinced him to give it a little more time, one more year. If at the end of another year, it still hasn’t accomplished its purpose, born fruit, then it will be cut down.

We are the fig trees. We have been planted in the Kingdom of God to bear fruit for the King. We are being warned that we have to make the best use of the time we have.

Augustine of Hippo was a world class procrastinator, at least when it came to the spiritual life. He knew he should change his life, reject his immoral lifestyle and embrace Christianity, but he kept putting it off. Through the prayers of his mother, St. Monica, Augustine finally did become a fervent Christian, but he would lament in his autobiography, the Confessions, that he wasted so much time,

“Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you!” Matt Maher does a wonderful job framing Augustine’s lament in his song, *Alive Again*. Augustine looked at his life and realized that he could have done so much more for the Kingdom of God, and would have been so much happier in his life, if he had not wasted so much time, if he had not procrastinated.

How about you? How about me? How are we bearing fruit for the Lord right now? You might say, “Well, I’m just a student in high school. I’m preparing for the future.” Yes, in the future you may be gifted with children to lead to the Lord. Yes, in the future you may enter a career like a nurse or doctor or social worker or priest which directly serves the Lord through His people. Yes, as an adult you may become very active in various charities, reaching out to those who need help and serving His Presence in the sick, the poor, the hurting, etc. But those are all in the future. What if the future does not come? Towers fall. Tragedies happen. What are you, what are we doing to serve the Lord right now? How are we bearing fruit for His Kingdom today and tomorrow?

You might say, “I’m a busy working mother or father. I intend on giving time for the Lord when I retire. Yes, I probably should have brought the kids to help at that homeless shelter, but time is limited. Charity will have to come later.” But, maybe later will never come. Maybe the grace to get into action is for right here, right now.

Everyone thinks there will be plenty of time to do wonderful things for the Lord when they retire. Ask the seniors. Seniors, ask yourselves: Do you have the ability and the energy to do all the good you always hoped you would do? Do you regret the times you could have gone into action but “tabled” working for the Lord?

We cannot put off being kind to people. Do we do that? Do we think that “I’m in a bad mood today. I’ll be nice tomorrow? If so we are not bearing fruit. Do we look at that person who is all alone, the social misfit, and try to bring her or him into our group? Or do we say, “Maybe tomorrow I’ll talk to him, spend some time with her?” If we put it off we are not bearing fruit.

Do we realize that others depend on us for our prayers? You are here, in Church, right now, asking God to watch over your families, your friends, and all those in need. You are bearing fruit even as we speak.

I am certain that we are all doing our best to live as committed Catholics. We are trying to be moral

people. We all have acquaintances who may have few moral guidelines in their lives. These people see that we do control ourselves, and yet, we are happier than those who are out of control. Maybe now, maybe sometime in the future, the Holy Spirit will jar their memories and they think about our happiness and then decide to live moral lives. And we will be bearing fruit.

Life is wonderful. Life is precious. Life is also short. We have got to make the best use of every day that we are granted. We are each the fig tree in the parable. The Father owns the vineyard, the Son is the gardener giving us the ability to grow. The Spirit is the gifts that we have which will attract others. But we have free will. It is up to us to chose to bear fruit for the Lord.

As we look at our lives during Lent, we ask ourselves: Are we bearing fruit?

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