

Commentary to the Third Sunday of Lent (C)



The Time to Produce is Now

"OK, I'll give the fig tree another year of care, but if it doesn't produce, it's out of here." Today's scripture contains a warning for us to make the best use of the time that we have on earth. We have all witnessed how some lives end far sooner than anyone expected. A few months ago we celebrated the funeral and the life of Devon Grimme, a brilliant young man, only 28, whose life was short, but full of love. I have witnessed even younger people pass on, Ray Jobin, Jamie Kelleher, Mary Aulino, and other children and Teens who brought God's presence to the world in many ways. As painful as it is for us to witness the death of the young, we have to remember that the quantity of years is not important; the quality of those years is what really matters. What is the quality of our years? How do we make the best use of the time that God has given us?

We are each a fig tree planted by the Lord to bear His fruit. He gardens us; He nurtures us; He cares for us with Word, Sacraments, and the Grace to seek His Presence in others. But we must produce. We are living on God's time, not our time. How well are we using this time? That is the challenge of today's Gospel reading. Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Messiah. He is our Loving Brother and our Compassionate Lord. He is also a prophet, The Prophet. And as The prophet He does not circumvent the message that we need to hear. He loves us too much to keep the truth from us, even if it is painful. And the truth is simple: we must fight evil and do good, repent and bear fruit as the gospel says, or we will suffer eternal death. There is a war enjoined. It is the war of God's kingdom against the forces of evil. This is not just an apocalyptic battle of St. Michael against the devil, it is a real life battle right here and right now of God's people against evil in the forms of materialism and hedonism. The ancient Christians believed that every Mass was another battle in the war, another victory for the Kingdom of God.

Martyrs were never seen as victims, instead they were victors defeating evil with its own instruments of death. We are all engaged in this war. The battle field is our homes where we have to put up a terrible fight to keep our lifestyles from falling into unchristian behavior. If we don't put up the battle

for Christian charity, horrible things can happen. Husbands and wives share a deep knowledge of each other. A good husband or wife shares his or her inner feelings, fears and joys with his or her spouse. But if the marriage is not founded on and centered in God's love, then the husband and wife can violate intimacy and use this knowledge to hurt each other. When that happens, then evil wins out. But in a real Catholic marriage, a marriage that is a sacrament, a marriage of two people united in the Love of the Lord, husbands and wives respect each other in all ways and profoundly. In this marriage fruit is produced, the fruit of sacrificial love. In the same way, if children don't respect their parents with the respect that reflects the Fourth Commandment, they can hurt their parents by talking back, being nasty, by doing those things that they know upset their parents. If parents allow their children to treat them with disrespect then evil wins out.

Raising a child is demanding work. It demands protecting them from hurting themselves not just physically but also spiritually. Children who find the way that God is calling them to live their faith are the fruit of committed Catholic parents. The battlefield is our jobs and our neighborhoods, where we have to be honest, and true, and faithful, and Christian. Many workplaces are horrible. Perhaps you have experienced a person destroying another's reputation to get a better job. When this happens evil wins a battle. People often play relationship games with others. Marital fidelity appears to be an afterthought in some people's minds. The person that stands for honesty and faithfulness, the person who is honorable in work and in marriage, is winning victory after victory for the Lord. He, she, is bearing fruit. The battlefield is our schools, where our children, Teens and young adults have to put up with mockery when they stand for what is right, proper and moral. Young people have a natural need to fit in. It takes tremendous courage for them to stand for their faith life, particularly when that stand is unpopular and seems to put them in some sort of moral minority. By the way, this isn't true. Most people in the schools are trying to be the best people they can be. But what if this were true? What if you were just one of the few who are determined to live morally.

Then consider this: It is better to be among the moral few than be part of the immoral many. It is better to be the lone tree that bears fruit than to be part of a non-productive orchard that is slated to be chopped down. Very often the battlefield is our country where we have to fight for morality regardless of the popularity of our stand. This fight might be the one we hear the most about, and we should because it is taking lives, abortion, or it may be the fight that we do not hear enough about, the fight that our country treat everyone justly with special care and protection for the poorest and most needy of our citizens. A country's greatness is seen in how it treats the least of its citizens. "Seek Justice, says the Lord, "and bear fruit. The fig tree has to produce fruit. Each of us is a fig tree. In today's gospel, Jesus reminds us, "Life is short. Make the best use of whatever time you have. And we still have time. It is not too late. The fig tree has been given another year. There is time for us to fight for the Kingdom of God. May God give us the courage to use His time wisely. May we bear fruit.

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