

**Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15**

**Psalm 103**

**I Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12**

**Luke 13:1-9**

**Homilist: Deacon Mike Mocek**

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Two and a half weeks ago, on Ash Wednesday, we began this Lenten season with familiar calls to repentance and to humility. The first reading that day, from the Book of the Prophet Joel, opened with the Lord saying, “return to me with your whole heart.” In the Gospel reading on Ash Wednesday, Jesus warned us against showing off with our almsgiving, praying, and fasting. Rather, he said, we should do these things so only the Father will see them. Then, as the ashes were placed on our foreheads, some of us heard another message of humility, “Remember, you are dust, and to dust you shall return,” while others heard a message of repentance, “Turn away from sin, and be faithful to the Gospel,” or, “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” These calls for humility and repentance are repeated and reinforced for us throughout the season of Lent in our liturgies, in our readings, and in our prayers.

Today, especially in the second reading and in the Gospel, we hear again the recurring themes of humility and repentance. In the second reading, from Saint Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, Paul warns Christians to avoid the pitfalls of presumption, or overconfidence. He cites as an example the Exodus of ancient Israelites who followed Moses into the desert. God had released these people from slavery in Egypt, gave them safe passage through the Red Sea, and nourished them with spiritual food and spiritual drink. But rather than accepting these gifts from God with humble gratitude, the people grumbled against God, and they abandoned their faith. Thinking they could make it on their own, most of the people never reached the promised land. They had it all, but they lost it when they turned away from God. In this letter, Paul is reminding the Corinthians and us that we are just as graced and just as fallible as our ancestors were in the desert. The final line of this reading is one that we all

should take to heart, “Whoever thinks he is standing secure, should take care not to fall.”

A casual reading of today’s Gospel will likely call to mind the subject of the best-selling book by Rabbi Harrold Kushner, “When Bad Things Happen to Good People.” Yes, Jesus is teaching that God does not cause suffering. The Galileans whose blood flowed with that of their Temple sacrifices died from Pilate’s wrath, not God’s, and the people of Jerusalem on whom the tower fell were victims of a catastrophe, not targets of divine justice. Despite the rantings of some fundamentalist preachers even to this day, God does not punish us with hardship. God gets us through our hardships. A closer reading of this Gospel will reveal that Jesus used these catastrophes as calls to repentance. That is his greater concern. Whether we are victims of catastrophe or not, we all sin, and we all need to repent. The severity of our sin is not as important to Jesus as is our repentance. That point may be hard for us to accept in our culture of self-righteous law and order, but Jesus emphasizes it twice in this reading. And he embodied that point throughout his ministry. He refused to condemn the woman caught in adultery. He welcomed corrupt tax collectors and sinners as his disciples. And above all, he promised paradise to the repentant thief on the cross.

The wise gardener in the parable of the fig tree asked the owner of the orchard for time to nurture the soil and tend the tree so that it might bear fruit in the future. Jesus is our wise gardener. He nurtures us with the Good News of the Gospel and gives us time to repent, to turn away from our sins, no matter how great or how small those sins might be, so we can answer our Christian call to conversion and, like the fig tree, bear good fruit in our lives.