

HOMILY for 3rd SUNDAY of LENT – Year C

Three nuns were each given \$100. The first nun said that she wanted to give hers to some Catholic Youth organization; the next stipulated that hers might go to a child welfare organization; & the third nun said she was going out on the street & give it to the first person she ran into that really looked like he needed it.

She went down the street & the first guy she met was an elderly fellow who was dressed in very shabby clothes, so she thrust the \$100 bill into the palm of his hand. She became choked up & really couldn't say anything except, "Godspeed."

Two days later this fellow appeared at the convent & said that he wanted to see the nun that had given him a \$100 bill. He tried to describe her & said that he really didn't know how to describe that wonderful nun but, anyway, he surmised that it was Sister Helena.

When she got to the door, the man said he was so grateful for what she had done the other day that he went to the local race track & Godspeed had come in first!

And he gave her \$800.00 – a cut on his winning horse!

Anyway, you might think that story happened by accident, or the man was lucky to win that bet at the local race track. But, the truth is that he was able to recognize God's messages to him that day & knew how to make it come true. Because of his ability to see & interpret God's communication to him, he was able to accomplish a lot even right here in this life. In case we might not realize how important that gift is for us on our faith journey, this Sunday's Readings want to remind us about it & tell us how to use it effectively this Lent.

Today's First Reading might simply be about how Moses was chosen to lead the people of God out of Egypt. But, the reading is more than that. It tells us about the personal conversion of Moses – from the moment he first met the Lord to the time he told the people of God that he would lead them out of Egypt. Here is how it describes his encounter with the Lord & his assigned mission. It says, "Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There an angel of the Lord appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. So, Moses decided, 'I must go over to look at this remarkable sight, & see why the bush is not burned.'" It adds, "...When the Lord saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' He answered, 'Here I am.' God said, '...I am the God of your father... I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt & have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know they are suffering. Therefore, I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians & lead them... to the land flowing with milk & honey.'"

As you can see, Moses was quite observant & able to recognize the sign of God's presence in the surroundings – specifically the burning bush. He saw something unusual/out of the ordinary like a burning bush & decided to check it out. What Moses did not know was that the Lord tried to get his attention with that unusual sight & invited him to take part in an important mission. Once Moses spiritually focused on the Lord, he was asked to come to the people of God to explain to them about the Lord's rescued mission from the Egyptians. The Lord also promised to lead the people of God to the wonderful land flowing with milk & honey. But, all of that could happen only if Moses was able to listen & see God's revelation to him in a mundane thing like a bush. If he had failed to tune into the divine messages to him, or lacked

focus on the spiritual world, the people of God would still suffer in slavery & have never heard about the Promised Land. Furthermore, the people of God would be pushed far away from God & have a tough time finding out more about their God's true identity & wonderful nature. They would miss out on God's daily messages to them & fail to live up to their great potentials.

It is that concern that Jesus wants to talk to us about in today's Gospel. He wants us to be like Moses & pay more attention to the divine communication to us every day. Otherwise, we will not be able to understand God's daily messages to us & will miss out a lot in this life. Jesus began to share His concern about that in today's Gospel by talking about the tragedies that happened in His community. He said, "Do you think that the Galileans [whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices] were the greatest sinners in Galilee just because they suffered this? By no means! But, I tell you, you will all come to the same end unless you reform. Or, take those eighteen who were killed by a falling tower in Siloam. Do you think they were more guilty than anyone else who lived in Jerusalem? Certainly not! But, I tell you, you will all come to the same end unless you begin to reform." So, what Jesus wants us to know is that, without our spiritual focus & intense search for God every day, we would misinterpret all our daily events, even those two tragedies that we were told. We would mistakenly blame those tragedies on the sins of the victims. But, with the right spiritual dispositions, we would view a tragedy like God's calling to us to reform/change our lives.

Jesus then used a parable of a fig tree & the owner of the vineyard to explain more about that message for us. He said, "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, & he came out looking for fruit on it but did not find any. He said to the gardener, 'Look here! For three years now I've come in search of fruit on this fig tree & found none. Cut it down. Why should it clutter up the ground?' In answer, the gardener said, 'Sir, leave it another year while I hoe around it & manure it; then perhaps it will bear fruit. If not, it shall be cut down.'" What Jesus wants to tell us in that parable is that we have to be a lively & productive fig tree if we want the Lord to let us be around a bit longer. In case we don't know, Jesus is the gardener who asks God the Father/the owner of the vineyard to let us have the second chance with His death on the Cross for us. I hope that we will not squander that second chance & will live up to our potentials & assigned mission.

My dear brothers & sisters, it is not easy to recognize God's presence & hear God's messages to us in this world. We live in a world that looks down on faith & spirituality. It has done everything possible to point us away from God & God's messages to us. Furthermore, we have allowed our busy schedule & other distractions to pull us away from the spiritual world. Perhaps, the Covid pandemic & other disasters/tragedies happening around the world these days are God's messages calling us to change & make our world a place of love & peace. So, I call on you to take this Lenten time to focus on your spiritual life & pay more attention to all the messages that God might send you every day. I encourage you to search for God's communication to you day & night & try to figure out its spiritual meanings. By doing that, we'll feel much closer to Jesus this Lent & understand better what He has done for us on the Cross.