

3rd Sunday of Lent - C
Exodus 3:1-8; 13-15;
I Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12;
Luke 13:1-9
Little Flower - 3/24/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

For the Israelites, the Exodus was the key event of Old Testament salvation history because God heard the cry of the Israelites and through Moses delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Today's reading from Exodus tells the story of God's theophany to Moses on Mount Horeb when God commissioned Moses to go to the Israelites to deliver them from Egypt. In today's second reading, St. Paul suggests that the Israelites' passage through the Red Sea as they fled Egypt foreshadowed Christian baptism and the manna in the desert and the water from the rock foreshadowed the Christian Eucharist.

A significant part of the story is devoted to the identity of God. First, God tells Moses that he is the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When Moses asks God what his name is, God responds, "*I am who am.*"

Many years ago, in a small book entitled *The Problem of God*, Fr. John Courtney Murray discussed three major interpretations of the meaning of God's name. Likewise, I once heard Fr. Michael Joncas, the composer of "On Eagle's Wings," discuss these same three interpretations. Each of these interpretations gives us different insights into the mystery of God.

In the first interpretation of "*I am who am,*" God is being. There are no limits or restrictions to the being of God. In the second interpretation, God's name means "I make to be whatever comes to be." For the Israelites, God was by definition power. In other words, God is both absolute power and absolute freedom.

However, both Fr. Murray and Father Joncas favored a third, relational meaning: "I shall be there as who I am shall I be there." Fr. Joncas added the words, "I shall be there for you as who I am shall I be there." According to Fr. Murray, this third interpretation tells us three things about God. God is immanent or present to us. God is transcendent or absent from us. In other words, God is totally other than us and ultimate mystery to us, yet God is transparent, revealing himself in his activity.

For a moment, I would like to focus on God's presence to us. When Moses approached the burning bush, *God said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."* Many years ago, in a recollection to priests of the Archdiocese, theologian Fr. Clyde Crews pointed out that although we tend to think of churches as sacred places, each person has his or her own sacred places.

When I shared this with one of my converts, she told me about a trip she took from Indianapolis to Chicago. On her way home, she stopped at Purdue where she had been an undergraduate. She walked around the campus, concluding her walk at St. Thomas, Purdue's Newman Center. For her, Purdue and St. Thomas represented a sacred place in her life. My suggestion to you this week is to ask yourselves where is your sacred place or places. Where are you most aware of the presence of God? Where is God most transparent to you?

In today's Gospel, Jesus discussed two contemporary events to argue that God does not cause bad things to happen to people to punish them for their sins. When we sin, sometime bad things do happen. However, God does not cause these bad things to happen. Rather, they are often the consequences of our actions. On the other hand, sometimes bad things happen that are unrelated to any sin we may have committed.

My brothers and sisters, although God does not cause the bad things that happen to us in our lives, Jesus is equally clear that we are accountable to God for our lives. Therefore, he calls us to repentance and promises us forgiveness. Today I would strongly encourage as many of you as possible to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation at our Lenten Penance Service tomorrow evening at 7:00 p.m. at Our Lady of Lourdes. As Jesus suggests in the parable in today's Gospel, our God is a God of many second chances.