



3rd Sunday of Lent



Date: Sunday, March 23, 2025 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** C

First Reading: Exodus 3:1–8a, 13–15

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 103:1–4, 6–8, 11 | **Response:** Psalm 103:8a

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1–6, 10–12

Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 4:17

Gospel Reading: Luke 13:1–9

Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House in the Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia.

The Exodus story is a timeless reminder of God’s deep and abiding concern for His people. From a bush ablaze but unconsumed, the Lord reveals Himself to Moses not with titles of grandeur, but with a name that echoes eternity: “I AM WHO I AM.” This is the God who hears the cries of the oppressed and acts decisively in history. The burning bush transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary, revealing the sacred in the mundane and inviting Moses—and us—to recognize God’s active presence in the world. How often do we pass by the burning bushes in our own lives, missing the signs of God’s call to liberate, to heal, to act?

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians shifts the focus from God’s mighty deeds to humanity’s fragile response. The Israelites, recipients of countless divine blessings, stumbled because they failed to live in fidelity. Paul warns us not to be complacent in the face of grace. It is not enough to have been delivered from slavery; we must live as people of freedom. Faith that does not bear fruit is faith in name only. Like the fig tree, we are given time and opportunity, but we must ask ourselves: are we growing in holiness, or merely standing still?

Jesus’ parable in the Gospel drives this point home. The tragedies of the Galileans killed by Pilate and the victims of the tower collapse remind us of life’s fragility. These were not divine punishments; they were moments to wake up to the urgency of repentance. The barren fig tree is a striking image of God’s justice tempered by mercy. The gardener pleads for one more year, one more

chance to cultivate life. This is the God we serve—a God who offers us time, not to delay but to transform. Mercy, however, is not infinite; it calls for a response, and the time for that response is now.

Psalm 103, in its lyrical praise, reveals the heart of God: compassionate, patient, and abounding in mercy. But God’s mercy is not a passive force; it is the active hand of the gardener, pruning, fertilizing, and drawing life from what seems lifeless. To repent is to allow ourselves to be shaped by that mercy—to turn away from sin and move toward flourishing. Repentance is not just a moment of contrition; it is a journey of growth, a reorientation of our lives toward God and others.

This call to repentance extends beyond personal conversion. It demands a transformation of society. In Zambia today, we see barren trees in the form of systemic injustices—poverty, corruption, and the marginalization of the most vulnerable. These are not abstract issues; they are the daily realities of the people we serve. Like Moses, we are called to hear the cries of the oppressed and act with courage. The Gospel compels us to labour for a society that bears the fruits of justice, peace, and dignity for all.

The life of St. John Ogilvie offers a profound witness to this call. As a Jesuit in a time of persecution, he risked everything for the faith, ministering in secret and ultimately giving his life for Christ. His refusal to compromise, even under threat of death, bears witness to a faith that is not barren but deeply rooted and fruitful. His life challenges us to consider: are we willing to take risks for the sake of truth, justice, and the Gospel? Or do we settle for comfort and complacency, content to let the fig tree stand without bearing fruit?

As we journey through Lent, we must take stock of our lives. The burning bush, the barren fig tree, and the merciful gardener all call us to action. And so, let us ask ourselves:

- Where is God inviting me to notice the burning bushes in my life, those signs of His presence calling me to something greater?
- What areas of my life remain unfruitful, and how can I open them to God’s transforming grace?
- How can I, like the gardener, commit to the slow and patient work of renewal—in my heart, my relationships, and my community?

The Lord is near, His mercy abundant, His call urgent. The fig tree still stands, but the time to bear fruit is now. Let us not delay. Let us turn, grow, and flourish in the light of His grace.

Let us also give thanks for Pope Francis' release from hospital.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.