

3rd Sunday of Lent, Cycle C: Mar. 7th, 2010

When you were growing up, how many of you had a specific bed time? It wasn't unusual for my sister and I to beg for just a little more time so that we could stay up just a little while longer to watch something on TV or read a story. "Just give us a little more time, please!" was our usual plea.

Now that sounds a little bit like the gardener in today's Gospel. The master wants to cut down the fig tree that hasn't produced any figs for the past three (3) years. However, the gardener asks for a little more time so that he can help the tree by fertilization and cultivation. Quite simply, the gardener hasn't given up on the tree and is hopeful that it can produce fruit.

It isn't difficult for us to learn something about our relationship with God from this story about the fig tree. Each of us at one time or another may have failed to produce the type of fruit that God is expecting us to bear. And what were these types of fruits that we were supposed to bear? They were the fruits of love, kindness and goodness. They were the fruits of forgiveness, understanding and compassion along with the fruits of perseverance, faithfulness and generosity.

Yet, when we fail to produce such fruit and our limbs are bare, so to speak, what does God do? He gives us more time so that we can be the type of people that he made us to be. He never gives up on us. You might even say that he is the God of second chances.

But, we also know that he is much more than the God of second chances. For he gives us chance, after chance, after chance because he loves us more than we can imagine. And, I'm sure that you are a bit like me and wonder why God gives us so many chances. Perhaps there is a clue in our First Reading, about the story of Moses and the "Burning Bush". Remember when he asks what "name" is he to give to the God who wants him to aid the Israelites, when he is asked by the Egyptians? God thus gives him a most interesting and revealing name that should tell us something. God calls himself: "I am!" I am? What exactly is that supposed to mean? What could God possibly be trying to tell us by referring to himself by such a name?

Well, for me, it reveals that God is a God of the present. He is most interested in what is happening right now! Notice that he doesn't call himself: "I was" or "I will be." No, God makes it perfectly clear that he is to be called "I am." I believe that he chose such a name so that he can begin immediately to cultivate our spiritual lives so that we can begin to bear that spiritual fruit that I spoke about.

For God realizes that most of us live in the past or the future and don't pay very much attention to the here and the now, maybe we are ego driven and only focus on the good we have done in the past. Or, perhaps we realize that we haven't produced much fruit and simply give up and defeatedly say something like: "I haven't produced much fruit in the past; therefore, I doubt if I ever will." Or, we can be lulled into believing that we've got plenty of time to begin to produce our "good" fruit. We don't have to start today, we can begin tomorrow or next week, or when it's more convenient. I've got plenty of time. There's no need to get in a rush.

Well, we should be more than grateful that God gives us a multitude of chances. We should also be even more thankful that he refuses to give up on us even when we have given up on ourselves. So, let's take advantage this very instant of his generosity to us. Let's not let this opportunity pass us by. When we hear in our hearts and souls God's voice calling to us, "Are you ready to be that beautiful person that I created you to be that person so full of love, compassion and kindness?" May we have the courage to say: "I am. I really am, right now, not yesterday or tomorrow, but right now!"