

Third Sunday of Lent



When Pope Benedict XVI was inaugurated as pope in 2005, his initial address drew from the wisdom of his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, as he declared, "Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to Him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom?"

This is a common attitude and belief among those seeking recovery from the family spiritual disease of addiction. Modern culture depicts a relationship with God as being a zero-sum game – that as we allow God to draw closer to us, we lose what is at the core of our identity and character. This week's Sunday Mass Readings capture the truth that God can free us from the isolation and burden of our loved one's addiction and make us radiate so as to give life and light to the world.

This Sunday's first reading is one we are likely familiar with – God appears to Moses through fire flaming out of a bush. "As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed." Moses gets closer to this remarkable sight and, as he does, God calls him by name.

This reading offers significant insight into the presence of God in our journey out of the vortex of addiction. He calls each one of us by name. The Third Step invites us to make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him. Like the burning bush, we can be fully assumed by God's presence while neither being consumed nor experiencing destruction. As the Book of Exodus continues, we learn that God cannot be limited to a finite category or definition:

Moses said to God, "But when I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' if they ask me, 'What is his name?' what am I to tell them?"

God replied, "I am who am."

Then he added, "This is what you shall tell the Israelites:

I AM sent me to you."

God knows our suffering and promises freedom from the captivity of addiction. He tells Moses that he will lead His people out of the desert and into a land flowing with milk and honey. He wants the same for us and our loved ones and He has shown us a new way. Unfortunately, we have a tendency to simplify and contain the identity of God when it comes to managing the addiction in our family.

The closer we allow God to us, the more we radiate. Yet, when we get caught up in our own self-righteous behavior and thinking, our lives become consumed. We end up alone and lost. Lent is a season of change and repentance, offering an opportunity to let Jesus Christ enter fully into our lives.

Through disclosure of our shortcomings and coming to believe that no human power can relieve us or our loved ones of addiction, we make room for the mystical presence of God to act within us. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Pope Benedict's inaugural address reiterates this and concludes, "Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life."

Reflection Questions

- What are some of the things you have feared might be taken away from you as you allow Jesus to enter your life? Have the results differed from your expectations?
- How do you relate to the fear and amazement of encountering God through a spiritual experience like a burning bush?
- How are you meeting Christ in the sacraments and 12-step recovery during this season of Lent?

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Sunday Mass Readings This Week

First Reading: Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11

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

Gospel: Luke 13:1-9