

Third Sunday of Lent: Life Is Short; or Is It?

We are saturated with negative after negative. There are wars through the world. There are natural disasters. There are fears of a new pandemic. We come to Church this weekend hoping to get away from all the negatives of life. And what do we find this Sunday? More negatives. Jesus speaks about a tower that had fallen. People have died in a construction accident. He speaks about how Pilate attacked Galilean zealots in the Temple itself. Many have died. The Lord asks "Do you think they were more guilty than others?"

All our lives will end sooner than we expected. But for us, followers of Jesus, only our physical lives will end. And this is the Lord's point: those who accept and live the Gospel, the Good News that there is more to life than death and destruction, will only see their physical lives come to an end. St. Irenaeus, the great father of Lyon, France, who lived at the end of the second century wrote, "The Glory of God is man fully alive." We are fully alive when we live the spiritual life given to us at our baptisms. Man, fully alive celebrates within him or her God's Glory, God's life. To be fully alive means that we have to make the best use of the time we have to bear fruit for the Lord.

The Lord offers us the parable of the fig tree. Just as the farmer is patient with the fig tree, giving it another year to bear fruit, the Lord is patient with us all. However, the time to bear fruit is limited. Soon, our physical lives will end. Then we will have to show the Lord the fruit of our lives. If we have fruit, then we have been fully alive. We cannot procrastinate. We have to bear fruit now.

Augustine of Hippo was a world class procrastinator, at least when it came to the spiritual life. He knew he should change his life, reject his immoral lifestyle and embrace Christianity, but he kept putting it off. Through the prayers of his mother, St. Monica, Augustine finally did become a fervent Christian, but he would lament in his autobiography, the *Confessions*, that he wasted so much time, "Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you!" Augustine looked at his life and realized that he could have done so much more for the Kingdom of God, and would have been so much happier in his life, if he had not wasted so much time.

There was a wonderful movie many years ago called *Schindler's List*. I'm sure many of you saw it. It won the academy award as Best Picture back in 1994. For those of you who do not remember the movie, it was the true story of Oskar Schindler a German industrialist at the time that the Nazi's were gathering up Jews to send them to what they said were work camps, but were really death camps. Schindler did his best to save women and children from deportation by claiming that he needed them in his factory. Their hands were small and they could fit parts into tight spaces. At the end of the movie, after the Nazi's were defeated and people like Schindler were praised, Schindler said, "But I could have done so much more." Yes, people recognized the good that he had done, but he knew that had he acted earlier more could have been saved. He could have given more of himself for the Lord.

How about you? How about me? How are we bearing fruit for the Lord right now? The young might say, "Well, I'm just a student in high school. I'm preparing for the future." Yes, in the future we may be gifted with children to lead to the Lord. Yes, in the future you may enter a career like a nurse or doctor or social worker or priest which directly serves the Lord through His people. Yes, as an adult you may become very active in various charities, reaching out to those who need help and serving His Presence in the sick, the poor, the hurting, etc. But those are all in the future. What if the future does not come? Towers fall. Tragedies happen. What are you, what are we doing to serve the Lord right now? How are we bearing fruit for His Kingdom today and tomorrow?

You might say, "I'm a busy working mother or father. I intend on giving time for the Lord when I retire. Yes, I probably should have brought the kids to help at that homeless shelter, but time is limited. Charity will have to come later." But, maybe later will never come. Maybe the grace to get into action is for right here, right now.

Everyone thinks there will be plenty of time to do wonderful things for the Lord when they retire. Ask the seniors. Seniors, ask yourselves: Do you have the ability and the energy to do all the good you always hoped you would do? Do you regret the times you could have gone into action but "tabled" working for the Lord?

For all of us, we cannot put off being kind to people, even with regard to our daily behavior. Do we do that? Do we think that "I'm in a bad mood today. I'll be nice tomorrow?" If so we are not bearing fruit. Do we look at that person who is all alone, the social misfit, and try to bring her or him into our group? Or do we say, "Maybe tomorrow I'll talk to him, spend some time with her?" If we put it off we are not bearing fruit.

We need to realize that others depend on us for our prayers. We are here, in Church, right now, asking God to watch over our families, our friends, and all those in need. We are bearing fruit as we pray.

Life is wonderful. Life is precious. But physical life is short. We have got to make the best use of every day that we are granted. We are each the fig tree in the parable. The Father owns the vineyard, the Son is the gardener giving us the ability to grow. The Spirit is the gifts that we have which will attract others. But we have free will. It is up to us to choose to bear fruit for the Lord.

As we look at our lives during Lent, we ask ourselves: Are we bearing fruit?