

1-2-2022

## 3rd Sunday of Lent - 20 March 2022

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### Recommended Citation

Moore, Gerard. "3rd Sunday of Lent - 20 March 2022." *Pastoral Liturgy* 52, no. 2 (2021): 1-6. <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/pastoral-liturgy/vol52/iss2/12>

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# 20 March 2022

## Third Sunday of Lent

Reflection by Gerard Moore

### **Pastoral Note: Third Sunday of Lent – First Scrutiny**

by Vincent Glynn

For those parishes who have candidates for the RCIA, this is the first Sunday of the three Scrutinies. These three Scrutinies are 'rites for self-searching and repentance and have above all a spiritual purpose' (RCIA 128).

The Scrutiny is celebrated after the homily in which the celebrant is encouraged to explain the meaning of the first scrutiny in the light of the Lenten liturgy and to encourage the elect that through the exorcism 'their spirit is filled with Christ the Redeemer, who is the living water'. This image is found in the gospel of the Samaritan woman (Year A) which can be proclaimed on this Sunday (RCIA 130).

In parish communities where the elect for the RCIA are taking part in the Lenten scrutinies, it is pastorally appropriate to read the gospel from Year A.

During this Third Week of Lent the elect are also presented with the Creed. The presentation takes place within a Mass celebrated in the presence of a community of faithful' (RCIA 144).

### **Introduction**

The Gospel of the Samaritan woman at the well matches the theme of water in the first reading, and opens onto conversion, forgiveness of sin, discipleship, water and baptism. As Lenten fare the readings encourage our ongoing conversion and appreciation of the forgiveness of God wrought in Christ, a forgiveness extended to the sinful and the outcast: there is no one excluded from its reach.

### **Penitential Act**

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you came to heal all sinners.  
Lord, have mercy.

You lead us to repentance.  
Christ, have mercy.

You bring us home to the Father.  
Lord, have mercy.

## **Collect**

### *The oration*

O God, author of every mercy and of all goodness,  
who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving  
have shown us a remedy for sin,  
look graciously on this confession of our lowliness,  
that we, who are bowed down by our conscience,  
may always be lifted up by your mercy.

### *Commentary*

To stand before God is inevitably to 'confess our lowliness'! The opening oration from the most ancient layers of Lenten prayers is one of the most compelling collects in the missal, hope filled, meditative and true to our nature. The invocation offers the rationale for Christian penitence. God is named as author of all mercy and all goodness. The sense of authorship should not be underplayed. In the prayer tradition the 'authoring' of God implies continued upholding, sustaining and completion. What God begins; the divine does not abandon. Our penitential practices, intensified in Lent but belonging to the Christian life as a whole, are fasting, prayer and almsgiving. Following longstanding Christian belief, they are a remedy for sin. We, for our part, caught up in this mercy and goodness, express who we are. In conscience we stand bowed, 'confessing our lowliness'. This beautiful sixth century expression captures our humility as sinners yet our confidence as believers. We who are bowed low know that in mercy and goodness we are able to be lifted. Even to feel the extent of our lowliness is a gift from the author of every mercy and all goodness. It is a fitting prayer for the first scrutiny of the catechumens.

## **First Reading**

### **Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15**

The meeting God arranges with Moses at the burning bush reveals the promise of God to be present, to liberate and to bring to a new land.

## **Responsorial Psalm**

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

#### *The Lord is kind and merciful.*

This psalm is echoed in the words of the Collect. To stand before God is to know justice, mercy and the one who is slow to anger and rich in mercy. Beautiful images of our God to whom we must return in humility over and over again.

## **Second Reading**

### **1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12**

For the Apostle Paul, whoever thinks they are standing secure should take care not to fall.

## Gospel Reading

### Luke 13:1-9

Jesus the master gardener cultivates us so that we may bear fruit.

## Reflection

Our opening lection from the Book of Exodus is perhaps the single most central passage in the entire Old Testament. That may well be verging on an overstatement, but the story of the burning bush contains the heart of the covenant:

God does not abandon the chosen people. This divine fidelity is the basis of faith, the font of Baptism, the food of the Eucharist, the meaning of Christianity and Judaism. It is on display across *Laudato Si!* It is the cause of our thanksgiving.

I would like to draw attention to the dynamic of the dialogue between God and Moses. There are multiple other colourings of the text: the holy mountain, the mysterious burning, the holy ground. These will be left aside for this reflection to take us to an essential foundation.

To take up the exchange we need to be mindful that God is the all holy divine one and Moses is a murderer in hiding, a renegade from the royal court, unwanted in his now lost home, and unwanted by his people of origin.

God announces his intention. The Holy One will relieve the sufferings of the people of Israel, will unburden them from slavery and bring them to freedom. Yet the wily Moses does not respond as expected. He seeks the 'name' of God. Moses does not trust the apparition, as appealing as the message may be. In the ancient world, to have the 'name' of someone was to have power over them, particularly a god. Moses wants power over God as a guarantee of the success of the mission. The Holy One knows the herdsman's strategy and ignores it. God speaks a phrase that is not a name, and in effect means that the name of God belongs to God alone, and no human can contemplate authority and power over God. It is a sharp disruption of Moses' plan, but not without comfort. In withholding the divine name, God sets out the divine promise. God will be with the people, God will free the people, God will bring the people to another land. If these things do not happen, then the people have every right to abandon belief in this God. In effect, God pledges fidelity to the people, a fidelity of presence, freedom and salvation. This is the foundation of the faith of Israel. Looking to our season, this is the meaning that Christ fulfills in the Spirit: presence, liberation and salvation. While there is no revelation of the divine name, there is complete revelation of the fidelity and the heart of God, who hears the people and saves them. This message sits fittingly at the midpoint of Lent.

Paul takes the Corinthian community on a mini-history lesson. His is a somewhat unconventional reading of the Exodus story. Normally a story of the triumph of the fidelity of God, here it is a cautionary tale delivered to a group that Paul considers far from perfect. As a Lenten text the main point is in the final sentence. Our security is from God, not from ourselves, and so use the opportunity that Lent brings to tame our sinful inclinations and embrace the love of God and the security it promises.

This Gospel passage has foreground and background, and both have lessons for us. The foreground is the theology of sin. At the time of Jesus, suffering in life was understood as a result of sin. We still have remnants of this most primordial thinking in our refrain 'what did I do to deserve this'. The teacher's point is to move away from this concept towards one of conversion and repentance. The followers are using despicable actions and unfortunate events – the perishing of others – as a distraction from their own self-reflection. This section of the passage is a call for Lenten conversion.

It is well matched with the image of the gardener who tends the fig tree. The fig tree garners our attention, but it is the gardener who is key to the narrative. The poor return from the fruiting tree is met with further care that seeks to shape a different future, one in line with the nature of the tree itself. Here we have the divine care that is on offer to us as we take up the sharpish directive for renewal. Together the plight of the fig and the response of the gardener are timely reminders for us in the middle of our period of Lenten discipline.

There are background events that have a bearing on the story. The narrative references the terrible violence and sacrilege of Pilate. We will soon enough in this season meet the violence and sacrilege of Pilate, now meted out to Jesus himself. Yet the reporting of this event to Jesus would have stung. He is a Galilean. This is another episode of the ongoing violence in his home region, the desperation of his own people, and the cruelty of the punishment exacted. Here the story is used as a prop for a discussion of the theology of sin and the place of conversion and repentance, but the effect on Jesus is unknown, yet would be a reminder of the oppression of the people and the danger of his own position. Ultimately Jesus' death and resurrection show up the violence of the Roman leadership. There is an opportunity here for us to think that our ongoing conversion cannot be complete without attention to the injustices among our people, and beyond.

This breadth of our compassion is brought further to the fore with the accident in Siloam. The tower fell and those beneath it tragically were killed. Again, the incident is used as a frame for a discussion of sin and conversion, but there is also something of developing a more adequate way of understanding tragedy and responding to it. Australians are good at this, generous to a fault. There are values here in the background that are well at home in the Australian culture and social fabric. This Lent is an opportunity to affirm and strengthen these.

Finally, to the underperforming Fig! There is an ecological message here that does not need to be laboured. What is our relationship to the earth: we are gardeners who are charged with care for the earth, not dominion over it. Taking up Pope Francis: 'The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself.' (*Laudato Si!* 66)

# Prayer of the Faithful

## Introduction

In Luke's Gospel we are called to repentance. With open minds and humble hearts, we now offer our needs to the Father.

## Petitions

We pray for Pope Francis, and all leaders in the Church as they prepare for the Synod in 2023. May they conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. No matter what disruptions, frustrations or difficulties arise may they respond with a Christlike attitude.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are preparing documents for the members of the Plenary Council and preparing for the second Assembly in July. May they be guided by the Spirit in their preparations so that the needs of the Church can be met, and Australian Catholics be guided towards a better Christ-centred future.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the world and its leaders during this pandemic that they will continue to act justly and humbly so that all people are vaccinated according to their need.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the RCIA Candidates and Catechumens that the Holy Spirit, who searches every heart, may help them to overcome their weakness and strengthen them to full conversion through the Sacraments of Initiation.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the needs of our families and community, especially when we are feeling disillusioned by our own weaknesses, that we can overcome our iniquities by prayer, fasting and works of mercy.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those suffering from grief. May they be gently comforted by those around them and may those who have died be resting in eternal peace.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

## Conclusion

Father you are kind and merciful. As we continue to seek a change of heart and mind, we ask you to hear the prayers we place before you through the power of the Spirit and in the name of Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

### GA

Christ is made the sure foundation. J M Neale/ H Purcell. 482  
God of mercy and compassion. M. Hodgetts/ P Jones. 302  
Grant to us, O Lord. L Deiss. 303  
Here I am, Lord. D. Schutte. 496  
I heard the voice of Jesus say. H Bonar/ R V Williams. 468  
Jesus, in your heart we find. J P McAuley/R Connolly. 464  
Return to God. M Haugen. 304  
Tree of life. M Haugen. 307  
When I survey the wondrous cross. I Watts/ E Miller. 330

### AOV1

Here I am, Lord. D. Schutte. 90  
I heard the voice of Jesus say. H Bonar/ R V Williams. 54

### CWB

God of mercy and compassion. Michael Hodgetts. 692  
Grant to us, O Lord, a heart renewed. Lucien Deiss. 698  
O bless the Lord, my soul. James Montgomery. 757  
There's a wideness in God's mercy. Frederick William Faber. 838

### CWBII

#### *Sunday by Sunday hymn suggestions*

God of mercy and compassion. Edmund Vaughan CsrR/Paul Bird CsrR. 290  
Grant to us, O Lord. Lucien Deiss CSp. 291  
From ashes to the living font. Alan J. Hommerding. 289  
Sing praise to the Lord all our days. John Moloney. 602  
There's a wideness in God's mercy. Frederick William Faber. 624  
*Additional selection by Chris deSilva*  
Return to God. Marty Haugen. 298

### S&S1

The Lord is kind and merciful. Rick Modlin. 77

### S&S2

The Lord is kind and merciful. Tom Booth. 274

## Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 102: *The Lord is kind and merciful.*  
Psalm 102: Christopher Willcock SJ. CWB 216  
Psalm 103 (102): Jenny O'Brien. JOBC pg. 30  
The Lord is kind and merciful. Marty Haugen LPC pg. 41

## Music selections by Michael Mangan

Create a new heart (FWS) *Based on Ps 50/51* [Gathering, Gifts, Recessional]  
Be with us (FWS) *Based on Ps 90/91* [Gathering, Gifts]  
This is the time (TT) [Gathering, Recessional]  
Lenten acclamation (TT) [Gospel Acclamation]  
Lenten gospel acclamation – Mass Jubilee (MJC) [Gospel Acclamation]  
Turn back to God (TT/SYJ) [CHILDREN: Gathering, Recessional]