

Encountering the Spirit

Week 3: Garden

Opening prayer

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. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. *R.* Amen.

(Collect for Third Sunday of Lent)

Review

Is there anything you would like to share about the previous week?



As we initiate this process (the Synod), we too are called to become experts in the art of encounter. Not so much by organising events or theorising about problems, as in taking time to encounter the Lord and one another.

Pope Francis Homily at the Opening of the Synodal Path, 10th October 2021

Scripture

Luke 13:1-9 Leave the fig tree one more year

Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices.

At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.'

He told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, "Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down."'



Synodal Pathway

Pope Francis asks us all 'to enter with confidence and courage into the path of Synodality. In this "journeying together", we ask the Spirit to help us discover how communion, which brings together in unity the variety of gifts, charisms, and ministries, is for the mission: a synodal Church is a Church "going forth," a missionary Church "whose doors are open" (EG, no. 46).

Preparatory Document 15)



Reflection

In all journeys there is a point when we need to look back to assess the route we have taken and where necessary make adjustments to move forwards. Think back to receiving the imposition of ashes at the beginning of Lent, this ancient and biblical sign of penance. What thoughts went through your mind? This action is a very public expression of our guilt as a sinner before the Lord, yet in doing so we also express our inner conversion, led by the confident hope of the Lord's mercy. One form used in placing the ashes is 'Repent, and believe the Gospel'. The English word 'repent' is rather a pallid translation of the Greek word 'metanoia' which is a spiritual change of heart and spiritual transformation. It includes a turning around and facing in a new direction towards Jesus.

Have we experienced a point in Lent, where there is the sudden risk of losing impetus and becoming complacent? There are those penances or actions where we feel that we are doing well, so we get a bit comfortable and puffed up with the achievement! Similarly, what other aspects of our nature need tending but get ignored, so that we risk becoming more like the fig tree and lacking in fruit. The ground in which the tree is planted is well-tended by the gardener, Jesus, but we need to make sure that our roots are open to receiving his nourishment. If not, we become sterile, which is then reflected in becoming incapable of giving, of doing good.

Although God is ever patient with us, we should not take this for granted, so that we keep putting off the real conversion that is needed. If there are attractions and weaknesses that draw us, then we only need to turn our face to God and ask for help. From this comes the change of heart that transforms both our life and world. We need to avoid falling into the trap of turning away

because we feel guilty and instead look at the loving face of God. If it helps, imagine a newborn baby who delights in looking into the face of the mother, feeling secure and loved. The baby recognises the mother, delights in her smell, smiles, talks and wants to be around her. This image is a wonderful way to understand the fruits and joy of what conversion brings.

That said, the call to conversion is daily. Reflecting on this gospel Pope Francis said, "Each of us, must feel challenged by this call, correcting something in our lives, in our way of thinking, acting and living our relationships with our brothers and sisters." (Angelus, March 2019). These words are a reminder that, just as God encounters us personally, we are also invited to be open to encountering others.

In the Synodal Pathway Pope Francis speaks of three verbs that characterises it: encounter, listen and discern. These are beautifully illustrated in the story of the barren fig tree. There is the encounter in the garden, the moment of listening to what the gardener says, and then the discernment that leads to continued patience. In becoming experts in the 'art of encounter' we will experience surprises in our journey through life.

If God is so generous with us, how will we respond in return and reflect that generosity of spirit in our life with our families and especially with those whom we encounter along the way? Our fruitfulness needs to be clearly displayed in the ways we interact with God and with the people around us. The gospel is filled with encounters where Jesus brings change and healing and we are invited to do the same: 'Jesus was always at the service of the person He was with, listening to what he or she had to say', (Pope Francis)

by Deacon Roger Carr-Jones

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus
I give you my hands to do your work
I give you my feet to go your way
I give you my eyes to see as you do
I give you my tongue to speak your words
I give you my mind that you may think in me
I give you my spirit that you may pray in me
Above all, I give you my heart
that you may love in me
your Father and all mankind
I give you my whole self that you may grow in me
so that it is you Lord Jesus
who live and work and pray in me. Amen
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QUESTION

What is the condition of the spiritual soil in our life? How do we participate and share in the mission of the Church through our life, using the gifts we have received from the Holy Spirit to enrich ourselves, our community and parish life?

POINT FOR ACTION

Discerning as a group, from everything you have shared in this time together, are we willing to listen to what the Holy Spirit is calling us to do as we 'journey together' in our parish, or community and the wider church?