**Third Sunday of Lent – Cycle C: Luke 14:1-9**

**Scriptural Reflection**: Our saint reflects upon the key theme of this Gospel reading, paraphrasing him that “God has promised infinite mercy to those who seek it, but never promised limitless time to repent.” We never know when God will call us home. Like Abraham, always ready to answer God’s call, “Hineni” – “Ready [to serve]”, here I am”, “reporting as ordered”, fully present to God as He is always in our lives. Thus, we must be ready answer, “Hineni” when He calls us home for His Merciful Judgement. The Fig Tree is a reference to the sterile and callous hearts, “no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree;” [Jerimiah 8:13] as the prophet explains the prophecy of Judah’s punishment. In the same way, Jesus is calling us to repent, to learn from our Jewish brothers and sisters to not let the callousness of our hearts interfere with God’s healing plan. Repent, and do it now. Always and often. It is said that St. John Paul II was in the confessional every day of his Papacy.

Will we make use of those figurative “three years”, so the “fig tree” of our soul doesn’t become callous, sterile and fruitless? Or will God have to give us a “holy 2x4”, a wake-up call, encouraging us to beg for another year to “fertilize the ground” of our souls, such that it bears fruit?

And what fertilizer will you apply to the soil in which your soul’s fig tree is planted? How do we access the medicine, the fertilizer of our souls?

What Interior dispositions that must change? What are those for you? What would you expect these fruits look like?

What fruitful exterior expressions might arise from application of fertilizer to your interior fig tree? Is this worth seeking out? Why or why not?

“Hineni” – Are you ready? Are you always ready? Given our saint’s and Jesus’ warning that we have finite time to “get right with God”, that time which God grants to each of us, yet with infinite mercy, how does this affect your understanding of “Fear of the Lord”? More loving, more Loved? More reverent? More resentful? Pressured? Relieved?

How does this change (or does it) your attitude toward the “right of conversion” or confession? Does the fact that a saint, like St. JP II, is willing to humble himself in conversion of heart to God everyday move you to imitate that behavior? If not, what would have to happen to move your heart to “Hineni”?

**Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent: Matthew 20:17-28**

**Spiritual Reflection**: In the Gospel, Jesus is trying to explain the His disciples what is to come – His condemnation, mocking, humiliation, scourging, crucifixion and resurrection, but the mother of the two sons of Zebedee and their mother are more interested in the rewards of heaven, and honors of the afterlife. Jesus redirections their hearts towards humility – “whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave…” Our saint tells us that they are looking away from the ugliness, the brutal reality of Our Saviors Passion that earns that opportunity of reward for them. They are distracted, likely purposefully, deceiving or distracting themselves. Since God speaks in a “still small voice” (see 1 Kings 19: 11-12), think about how easy is it for the devil to provide a tyranny of noise that drowns out that voice.

Do you feel alone, isolated or separated from God? Have you allowed the devil to create a tyranny of noise in your life? What form of noise does that take? Pop Music? Internet? Social Media? Gossip? T.V.? Theater? Food? Pornography? Shopping? Workaholic/money? Drugs/Alcohol? Some other escape?

What are you avoiding? Or are you just going around the roadblocks/cones the devil sets up on the narrow way, not thinking you are off the path?

How would your life be different with more Holy Silence? By avoidance and rejection of the tyranny of noise?

What can you do to create more Holy Silence in your life? In your home? In your dorm? In your soul? In your environment and in your heart?

What can you do to filter noise from you soul? What can you fill it with instead? Eyes, ears, mouth, touch, smell, mind, soul, memory?

How often do we (like the sons of Zebedee and their mother) think of the glories of Heaven and not the road (the Passion of Jesus) that we are called to walk, the cross to bear, the bitter chalice to drink? Jesus directs us to humility, to servitude, if we wish the glories of heaven. If Jesus asked you, “Are you able to drink the Chalice that I will drink?” What would you answer? Why would you answer that way? What would drive your answer? Fear or Charity?

**Friday of the Second Week of Lent: Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46**

**Catechetical Reflection**: For this reading, our saint offers us only 5 words, “Our souls are vineyards.” The author in the reflection states that this “gives an immediacy and intimacy to it which makes us realize how close God is to us and how diligently we must cultivate this vine, especially during Lent… to bring forth the fruit… that God expects from us when he sends his messengers… We must not reject them.” CCC 755 tells us that “The Church is a cultivated field, the tillage of God… [and] That land, like a choice vineyard, has been planted by the heavenly cultivator. Yet the true vine is Christ who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to us…” and in CCC 787, “…he proclaimed a mysterious and real communion between his own body and ours: “he who east my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him”. Remembering that this Holy Communion, in each species, is the body, blood, SOUL and divinity of God, and recalling the five words of our saint, consider the following:

If our souls are vineyards as our saint proclaims, what do you do for cultivation of that vineyard?

What more could you do?

If we understand CCC 755 & 787 to mean that our souls are planted by God, and God grace gives us the fruitfulness, what must we do to cooperate with God’s plan? What changes in your life must you make? Do you want to make changes? Why or Why not?

How would you measure the fruitful yield of cooperating with God’s plan? Hours? Minutes? Souls? Prayers? Penitential acts? Lives? Lack of Sins? Good works? Why would you use this or these metrics?

In the gospel, the landowner sends servants (think prophets) and eventually his son (think Christ) to collect the harvest from the field he planted with the tools and protection He provided. The tenants, (think you and me) – actually directed at the Chief Priests and the Elders— reject and kill them all. Then Jesus recalls Psalm 118:22 that “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone…” It appears to be no coincidence that CCC 756, (immediately following 755, talking about the vineyard) addresses this very liturgical text describing the cornerstone, as “the holy temple” of God, which as St. Paul tells us that our bodies, in which our souls reside and give us life, “are God’s Temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in [us].” [1 Cor 3:16]. Is maintaining the temple of your soul any different from maintaining the vineyard? Why or why not?