

Homily of Third Sunday of Lent Year C

The first reading tells about the call of Moses. Moses had fled from Egypt to Midian. There, he was tending the flock of his father-in-law. While in the region of Mount Horeb he was called by God: "An angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in fire flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. So Moses decided, 'I must go over and look at this remarkable sight, and see why the bush is not burned.' When the Lord saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' He answered, 'I am here.' God said, 'Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. ...' God, I AM, then, gave Moses the mission to go and get the Israelites out of Egypt.

We need not wait for God to call us in a dramatic way. The Eucharistic celebration is our own "flaming fire out of a bush." Coming to church is like Moses going over to see the flaming fire. Raising our voice in prayer is like approaching the flaming fire. Approaching the altar to receive the Holy Eucharist is like approaching the flaming fire. 'I AM' speaks to us through his word we have read. He invites each one of us to "remove the sandals from [our] feet." This means to remove the 'sandals' of sin.

Psalm 15: "Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy mountain? Whoever walks without blame, doing what is right, speaking truth from the heart; who does not slander with his tongue, does no harm to a friend, never defames a neighbor; who disdains the wicked, but honors those who fear the Lord; who keeps an oath despite the cost, lends no money at interest, accepts no bribe against the innocent. Whoever acts like this shall never be shaken.

Psalm 24:3-5: "Who may go up the mountain of the Lord? Who can stand in his holy place? The clean of hand and pure of heart, who has not given his soul to useless things, what is vain. He will receive blessings from the Lord, and justice from his saving God."

Isaiah 33:14-15: "Who of us can live with consuming fire? Who of us can live with everlasting flames? Whoever walks righteously and speaks honestly, who spurns what is gained by oppression, who waves off contact with a bribe, who stops his ears so as not to hear of bloodshed, who closes his eyes so as not to look on evil."

God sent Moses to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. God said, "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and I have heard their cry of complain ... I know well what they are suffering." God may be sending us to a mission to free someone whom God has witnessed the person's cry and suffering. Our excuses and reluctance are the 'sandals' on our feet. When God minister's such call in our hearts, let us not, like Moses, become afraid and hide our face from God. Let us, rather, pray for the grace to carry out God's command. St. Bernardine of Siena writes, "This is a general rule that applies to a rational creature. Whenever divine grace selects someone to serve a particular grace, or some especially favored position, all the gifts for his state are given to that person, and enrich him abundantly." Simply put, when God give us a mission, he gives us the grace. May such grace not pass us by due to the 'sandals' on our feet.

The Gospel reminds us that although we are sinners and unworthy, yet God gives us opportunities to return to him, opportunities to become what he wants us to be, opportunities for greater heights, opportunities for progress, opportunities to break new grounds, opportunities to bear fruits; we must not continue to waste such opportunities. Such opportunities do not continue forever. St. Peter writes, "God's patience is our opportunity to be saved" (2 Peter 3:15). An English proverb says, "Make hay while the sun shines." A Nigerian Igbo adage says, "Gather in your black goats while it is still day. You may not be able to see the dark goats in the darkness of the night."

Jesus speaks of the possibility of the door of opportunities closing; "After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, 'Lord, open the door for us.' He will say to you in reply, 'I do not know where you are from'" (Luke 13:25). God of mercy is also God of justice. God of mercy is also God of justice. "Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not, you can cut it down."

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