

## Homily for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent

Two weeks ago, as we began our Lenten journey, I tried to give you the “big picture” of Lent – what it’s all about. I said the first part of Lent focuses on compunction – that is, remorse, or sorrow for our sins. Then, the second part of Lent that flows out of this compunction is conversion – that is, repenting of our sinful past and turning back to God.

Then, last week, I wanted to give you the motivation of why to go through this whole compunction and conversion thing. And I said it all had to do with love. Because we love God – because we want a loving, personal relationship with Him – we feel sorrow for our sins, we seek His forgiveness, and we turn back to Him. Love.

Well, this week, I thought we’d go one step further and talk about what a loving, personal relationship with God looks like through the journey Moses took, which we heard unfolding in our first reading today. Now, we probably take for granted that Moses just always had this amazing relationship with God – like, he just knew that he was going to make all these plagues come about in Egypt and that he was going to part the Red Sea, and things like that. But actually, like all people, Moses’ relationship with God unfolded in stages.

So, enter the passage that we heard today from the Book of Exodus. We're all familiar with how it starts – a burning bush. Now honestly, if you were taking a hike at Codorus or somewhere else and a bush just catches fire before your eyes, you're probably going to be a little bit terrified – but, at the same time, more than a little bit curious. That was one of Moses' first steps in his relationship with God – curiosity. He wanted to see what it was all about. Similarly, for us, we might find ourselves curious about this God and His Church we hear about each week. We probably learned about Jesus growing up. We've heard the stories in the Bible. Maybe we've been inspired by the faith of other people too, which really made a difference in their lives. So maybe now, we're curious to find out more.

But, in the case of Moses, his curiosity had to be accompanied by a degree of initial trust. He had to trust that if he went over to that burning bush calling out his name that he wasn't going to suddenly catch on fire or that the bush was going to explode. Similarly, we too can have at least a little trust that coming to Mass each week and seeking a relationship with God will not result in us spontaneously combusting or getting struck by lightning – just ain't gonna happen.

And so, after Moses let himself get closer to God in the burning bush, he heard God call him by name: “Moses! Moses!” What – the burning bush talks? Do you know that God knows *your* name – that He knows *you* personally – that He has loved *you* from all eternity?”

“OK. Stop right there, Father. This is hitting a little too close to home.” Hmmm. Maybe Moses felt the same way. Because right after God called out Moses by name, Moses got afraid and hid his face from God. Has the experience of your sinfulness ever caused you to hide from God instead of getting to know *His* name? Yep. Just like Adam and Eve ,who hid from God in the garden right after they had pridefully disobeyed Him, so too can we.

But, just like God didn't give up on our first parents, He didn't give up on Moses either. And He certainly never gives up on us. In fact, to calm Moses' fears that the Almighty God was speaking to him, God humbled Himself to let Moses know that He was truly concerned about what he and his people back in Egypt were going through. In fact, we hear God say in Exodus: “I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry... Therefore I have come down to rescue them...and lead them out of that land into... a land flowing with milk and honey.” Similarly, when we are confronted about the truth of our sinfulness, as happens during Lent, God doesn't want to embarrass us or even punish us for it. Rather, He wants to forgive all our sins. He wants to help us as only He can. Now, when someone comes to you in your need – let's say you've had a bad day and they ask you how you're doing and then listen – doesn't it create a space for you to open up and let them in to help you? The same is true with us and God when it comes to our sins. This is the next step in Moses' relationship with God too – spiritual openness.

It's said: "We don't care how much someone knows until we know that they care." Well, this rang true in Moses' life. Because all the sudden, when he found out that God was for him and his people and not against them, everything changed. In fact, Moses says to God, "When I go to the Israelites..." OK – now all the sudden Moses is cooperating with God's plan for his life – now he's going down to Egypt to confront Pharaoh? Similarly for us, when we believe in our hearts and actually experience that God is for us and not against us – that He loves us – that He wants to heal us from our sins – and that He has a plan for our lives – that our spiritual openness now leads to spiritual seeking. Because we trust that God's plan for each and every single one of us is for our good, we actually begin to seek Him, and we want to know His plan for us!

Well, then, after Moses opened up and accepted God's plan for him, then he wanted to know God more. And so he says, "What's your name?" For us too, when we experience God wanting only good for us in our lives, and we really seek to put our faith in Him in concrete ways, then we want to know Him more. All of the sudden, God goes from that stranger on the street, whom we never even consider has a name (let alone think to ask it), to someone we want to know personally.

Finally, at the “end” of Moses’ spiritual journey – which is meant to teach us all a lesson, and didn’t happen nearly as fast as I just made it seem – he made the commitment to follow God and God’s will in his life. And so Moses went to Egypt, and we went before Pharaoh. And God did amazing things in his life – all because he took a risk that began with that initial trust and curiosity. And the same is true for us. When we get to know Jesus personally and are open to continually experiencing His love for us in concrete ways, then we want to follow Him. Then, we become like Moses and Peter and the Apostles. Then, we become intentional disciples. If you’d like more information on the path to knowing and following Jesus as His intentional disciples, I highly recommend to you the book by Sherry Weddell called *Forming Intentional Disciples*. I will have further information about this book in next week’s bulletin. And there’s also a link on our parish website and Facebook page. God bless you.

## Personal Relationship with God vis-à-vis Moses and the burning bush:

- Moses comes into contact with God IN STAGES (*Forming Intentional Disciples* – pg. 129-130)
- First, he is curious (bush burning but not consumed)
  - o Curiosity is one of the most basic (first) steps
  - o We might be curious about God and His Church because of what we've learned growing up, the stories we read in the Bible, other people who have inspired us by living out their faith, etc.
- Curiosity goes along with trust, though. What enabled the curious Moses to go over to the burning bush was because he had at least a little initial trust that the bush was not going to light him on fire, explode, etc.
  - o Similarly, we can have at least a little trust that coming to Mass each week and coming into the church will not result in us spontaneously combusting or getting struck by lightning
- Then, Moses hears God call him BY NAME – Moses
  - o Do you know that God knows your name? He has loved you from all eternity!
- But, then Moses got afraid, so he hid his face from God
  - o Has the experience of your sinfulness caused you to hide from God, instead of getting to know HIS name?
- So, to calm Moses' fears that the ALMIGHTY God was before Him, God humbles Himself to let Moses know that He is concerned about him and his people (i.e. God has witnessed the Israelites' affliction and He's going to do something mighty about it!)
  - o When we are confronted about our sinfulness before God, He does not want to embarrass us or even punish us for it – rather, He wants to forgive it.
  - o Like in the Nationwide commercial: all the other instances of this man being ignored, and the Nationwide agent comes to him in his distress and treats him like a person and says, "How can I help?"
  - o When someone comes to you in your need, it creates a space for you to open up and let them in to help you – the same with us and God when it comes to our sins
  - o This is the next step – spiritual openness
- Then, all the sudden, when Moses found out that God was for him and his people and not against them, it changed everything: Moses says, "When I go to the Israelites..." – OK, now all the sudden He's cooperating with God's plan for His life.
  - o Similarly, when we believe in our hearts and actually experience that God's loves us, that He wants to heal us from our sins, and that He has a plan for our lives, that we can trust Him – we can trust that He has a plan for each and every single one of us that is for our GOOD!
  - o This is the next step – spiritual seeking
- Then, after Moses opens up to God's plan for Him, he wants to know Him more – He says, "What is your name?"

- For us too, when we experience God wanting only good for us in our lives, and we begin to trust Him (that is really put our faith in Him in CONCRETE ways), then we want to know Him more. All the sudden God goes from that stranger on the street whose name we don't even think to ask, to someone we want to know personally.
- Finally, Moses make a commitment to follow God and His will in His life and he went to Egypt; he went to Pharaoh; and God did amazing things in his life – all because Moses took a risk that began with initial trust
  - The same for us, when we get to know this God personally and have continually experienced His love for us in concrete ways, then we want to follow Him
  - This is intentional discipleship