

3rd Sunday of Lent - C
Exodus 3:1-8; 13-15;
I Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12;
Luke 13:1-9
Little Flower - 3/23/25

My Brothers and Sisters,

For the Israelites, the Exodus was the key event of Old Testament salvation history because God heard the cry of the Israelites and through Moses delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Today's reading from Exodus tells the story of God's theophany to Moses on Mount Horeb when God commissioned Moses to go to the Israelites to deliver them from Egypt. In today's second reading, St. Paul suggests that the Israelites' passage through the Red Sea as they fled Egypt foreshadowed Christian baptism and the manna in the desert and the water from the rock foreshadowed the Christian Eucharist.

A significant part of the story is devoted to the identity of God. First, God tells Moses that he is the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When Moses asks God what his name is, God responds, "*I am who am.*"

Many years ago, in a small book entitled *The Problem of God*, Fr. John Courtney Murray discussed three major interpretations of the meaning of God's name. Likewise, I once heard Fr. Michael Joncas, the composer of "On Eagle's Wings," discuss these same three interpretations. Each of these interpretations gives us different insights into the mystery of God.

In the first interpretation of "*I am who am,*" God is being. There are no limits or restrictions to the being of God. In the second interpretation, God's name means "I make to be whatever comes to be." For the Israelites, God was by definition power. However, both Fr. Murray and Father Joncas favored a third, relational meaning: "I shall be there as who I am shall I be there." Fr. Joncas added the words, "I shall be there for you as who I am shall I be there."

For a moment, I would like to focus on God's presence to us. When Moses approached the burning bush, God said, "*Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.*" Many years ago, in a recollection to priests of the Archdiocese, theologian Fr. Clyde Crews pointed out that although we tend to think of churches as sacred places, each person has his or her own sacred places.

For example, if your memories of your childhood are largely good, your family home may be one of the places where you experienced God. I certainly feel this about our family home at 1112 N. Wallace. One of my converts graduated from Purdue. She told me that whenever she returns to Purdue, she visits St. Thomas, the Catholic student parish, because it was a place where she experienced God in a special way.

Certainly, for many of us, Little Flower is a sacred place—the old church, the new church, the school. People will talk about how they were baptized, made their First Communion, were confirmed, married, and had their children baptized in the old or new church. Probably the best evidence of the sacredness of this place in the lives of Little Flower parishioners is the number of parishioners who move away from the neighborhood but choose to continue attending church and school here and the number of people who make a point of returning to their Little Flower church-home each year for Christmas Mass.

My suggestion to you this week is to ask yourselves where is your sacred place or places. Where are you most aware of the presence of God? Where is God most transparent to you?

In today's Gospel, Jesus discussed two contemporary events to argue that God does not cause bad things to happen to people to punish them for their sins. When we sin, sometime bad things do happen. However, God does not cause these bad things to happen. Rather, they are often the consequences of our actions. On the other hand, sometimes bad things happen that are unrelated to any sin we may have committed.

My brothers and sisters, although God does not cause the bad things that happen to us in our lives, Jesus is equally clear that we are accountable to God for our lives. Therefore, he calls us to repentance and promises us forgiveness. As Jesus suggests in the parable in today's Gospel, our God is a God of many second chances.