

**LENT III SUNDAY: Ex. 3:1-8, 13-15; I Cor. 10:1-6, 10-12; Luke 13: 1-9**

All three of today's readings speak of God's mercy and compassion in disciplining his children and giving them a second chance in spite of their repeated sins. Although God's love for us is constant and consistent, He will not save us without our co-operation. That is why He invites us during Lent to repent of our sins and to renew our lives by producing fruits of love, compassion, forgiveness, and faithful service.

Hence a Lent missed is a year lost from the spiritual life.

I have a small story: Mike was sixteen years old when he landed up in an institution for young offenders in Canada. He blamed his troubles on "mixing with the wrong crowd". Today he's twenty-four, finishing his degree and heading for medical school. It's a monumental turnaround. But how did it come about?

He was lucky enough to be offered a scholarship from Canada's Second Chance Scholarship Foundation, which provides finance for young offenders and those at high risk of offending. Those behind the foundation believe any young person can become an educated, responsible and contributing member of society if they are given financial and other support.

A judge who is a patron of the foundation says, "I have always believed in giving young people a second chance and the results pay dividends, not just to the kids, but to society." Mike himself is grateful for his second chance. "They supported me," he says, "I was given hope when there was no hope."

Today's parable in the Gospel has been called the parable of the second chance because it teaches that God offers people a second chance, as the apostle Peter and Paul could testify. The gardener tells the owner of the vineyard that it is necessary to give the fig tree another chance to produce fruit. With nourishment and care, something may come from the life of the tree.

Lent is the ideal time to dig around and manure the tree of our life so that it may bring forth fruits. The fruits God expects from us during Lent are repentance, renewal of life and the resulting virtues of love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, selfless and humble service. Let us start producing fruits in the family by becoming more sensitive to the feelings of others, and by accepting each member of the family with love and respect. The Christian fruit of reconciliation will grow in the family when each member shows good will by forgiving others, and by asking their forgiveness. We become fruit-bearing in the community by caring for the poor, the sick, the old and the lonely.

**JOKE OF THE WEEK:** #1 Pastor's temptation and policeman's forgiveness: In a large city, a priest parked his car in a no-parking zone because he couldn't find a metered space. He put a note under the windshield wiper that read: "I have circled the block 100 times. If I don't park here, I'll miss my appointment. ***Forgive us our trespasses.***" When he returned, he found a citation from a police officer along with this note: "I've circled this block for 10 years. If I don't give you a ticket, I'll lose my job. ***Lead us not into temptation.***"