

Third Sunday of Lent
March 24, 2019

Three weeks have already gone by since we began Lent. Some might say, thank goodness, others will say who cares, but hopefully you will have a gentle restlessness in your heart and a healthy dissatisfaction that Lent has not been all that you had hoped for. Hopefully, you are not discouraged but with greater resolve, in a greater sense of urgency, set out on this last half of Lent, more eager than ever to be renewed.

Lent is not about the ashes. It is about the fire. It is about the fire in the burning bush as Moses stood barefoot before the Lord. The fire is the fire of God burning in our soul. Depending on what you want to have burning, it can be difficult to start a fire. On the farm I have a huge brush pile that I want to burn. It has debris from two flash floods in the last two years. Inside the pile there are huge tree trunks, some with all the roots. Mixed in are brush and brambles. In order to get the pile to burn I have to work the pile, split up the large pieces and compact it.

Lots of people came here on Ash Wednesday with the ardent desire to re-enkindle the fire of God in their soul. Many more, I am sure, wanted to come but their schedule didn't allow it. Some didn't come because of lack of gumption. Some people, I suspect, did some drugs or some other misguided pursuits in a clumsy attempt to light the fire within.

Now we are like that fig tree in the garden of the gospel. It has not done all that well as far as bearing fruit. The gardener is God. He gives it another year to make good. But during that year He vows to cultivate the ground and fertilize it and give us every chance to grow and to flourish and bear good fruit. Think of all the graces that God bestows upon you every day. How awesome the gentle and loving care our Lord and Creator gives us.

Look at what is happening outside. Just a few weeks ago we had blizzard conditions. Today you can sense the emergence of new life. It's walleye days in Nekoosa. Some people are harvesting maple syrup. Farmers and gardeners are getting ready to plant. (Easy now, don't put away the snowplow) It is an exciting time, vigorous and full of life. Just as it says in the second reading today, I do not want you to be unaware,

brothers and sisters.... That this is not about a fig tree. It is about you, the deepest part of you. God wants to nourish and take care of you.

The last half of Lent culminates with holy week, good Friday, and Easter. May it also culminate hope and joy in your life. There are many opportunities available to enhance your Lenten experience. Of special note are confessions and our special Lenten program, Formed for You.