

Lent 3C

Once upon a time there was this preacher who felt so fed up with his job that he decided to try his hand at something else. He went for a job at the local zoo but the position had just gone. However, the local gorilla, the children's favourite, had just died. Not having an immediate replacement, the minister was asked if he would fill in, don a gorilla costume and do a stint at entertaining the children. He reluctantly agreed. He was a great hit with the children. On one occasion, he jumped up on the trapeze bar and began to swing back and forth with great enthusiasm to the added laughter of the children. Suddenly, he slipped off the bar and went flying over the railing into the adjoining cage where a hungry looking tiger was crouched over him with a large paw on his chest. Forgetting that he was supposed to be a gorilla, he shouted at the top of his voice, "Help! Help! get me out of here". The tiger retorted, "keep quiet, you fool, I'm Father Kelly".

So whether we're dressed as a gorilla or a tiger, in dog collar or ordinary clothes, we're all in the same boat or in the same cage, when it comes to ongoing repentance. It's so easy to look out onto the world and go on a tirade against those who apparently commit awful crimes and forget to take a long hard look at ourselves.

It is said that comparisons are odious. The temptation is to minimise, even justify our own sins when comparing them to those whose 'falls from grace' often hit the headlines. The apostles seemed to have fallen into this trap when they suggested that the 18 people on whom the tower of Siloam fell must have been worse sinners than the rest of the people in Jerusalem. Jesus emphatically puts them right on this. Do you remember when the Haitian earthquake happened? Well, one pastor in America was suggesting that because the indigenous people were into voodoo and witchcraft, they left themselves open to this calamity.

Yes, I have no doubt there are much worse people in the world than you and me. What we've got to do, however, is pray that they will receive the grace of God to turn their lives around. Our prayers and fasting will help bring people back to God. Our Lady of Fatima predicted the second World War but if people repented and fasted, she said, they could prevent it. St Theresa prayed for a notorious death row criminal that he would turn to God before his execution. As he ascended the scaffold he was seen to kiss the crucifix. That was all she needed to prove her prayers had been heard.

The parable of the barren fig tree brings out God's undying patience with all of us but it's a timely warning as well. He gives us ample opportunities to repent and sort ourselves out but if we keep putting it on the back burner, we may run out of time. The longer we leave it the harder it gets.

The words of St Robert Bellarmine, however, should fill us with hope: 'He who commits sin does what is not pleasing to God, but he who repents of his sins does what is most pleasing to Him'.