

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 and cheers of the children. Suddenly, he slipped off the bar and went flying over 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 uniform or civies, 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 the bigger sins of others. The apostles seemed to have fallen into this trap when they seemed to suggest 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 disagrees. Do you remember when the Haitian earthquake happened? Well, one insensitive pastor in America was intimating that because the indigenous people were into voodoo and witchcraft, they left themselves open to this disaster. Sounds like a rather sweeping statement.

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 Lady of Fatima asked us to add the following prayer to each decade of the Rosary. *"O Jesus, lead all souls to Heaven especially those most in need of your mercy"*. Our prayers and fasting will help bring people back to God. Again at Fatima in 1917 Our Lady foretold to the seers that the war will soon end but she added a worse war was coming, but if people repented and fasted they could avert 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 did not go unheeded.

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 off, 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'. There's joy in Heaven when a sinner repents.