

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT (2025 - C)

As we gaze upon the cross, and see our Lord hanging there with nails through His hands and feet, with a crown of thorns about His sacred head, with lacerations from the whips by which He was scourged, we can't help but be moved. Any normal person would be horrified and deeply saddened by this sight. Indeed, to see anyone so terribly treated and abused should leave us all in great anguish.

I think we all would agree that even the most vicious and brutal criminals do not deserve to undergo the torture and abuse which our Blessed Lord endured upon the cross.

As we gaze upon the cross and think of our Lord hanging there and all of the sufferings He endured, we have to ask ourselves once again, Why? Why was this all necessary? After all, Jesus was the Son of God and King of all creation.

Furthermore, since He is all-powerful, we know that no one could have forced Him to endure this horrible torture and death. There is no power in the universe equal to or greater than God. Therefore, we must conclude that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, endured this dreadful suffering and death of His own free will.

Now, we really have a mystery ... So again, we have to ask even more urgently, "Why? What for? What was the reason?"

The answer is both simple and yet profound. The answer is to save us from our sins. **"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16)."**

We can only marvel at a love like this. We can only be astonished. The Father loved us so much that He was willing to allow His Son to suffer and die for us on the Cross. What an incredible thing! What a precious gift! It's almost unbelievable. In fact, over the centuries, there have been many who have found it too hard to believe, and yet it's true.

To put Christ's death in perspective, just for a moment, ask yourself this. Would you be willing to sacrifice your own son or daughter, would you willingly allow them to be tortured and to suffer and die in exchange for the life of someone you loved?

Now, add this twist to it: How many of you would be willing to sacrifice your son or daughter for someone you not only did not love, but who was in fact your enemy? I would not. In fact, I would answer no to both questions.

Now we're starting to get an idea of the significance of Christ's death on the cross. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son ... Not just for saints, but for sinners. God the Father gave His only Son for everyone who has ever lived, the good and the bad alike.

Now do you realize just how precious you are in God's eyes? Have you ever stopped to consider how much you are loved by God? God was willing to give the life of His own beloved Son to prove His love for you. We could all just stop and think about that for a while.

However, we still have not gotten to the bottom of the "Why?" question. We can say that Jesus died out of love for us, we can say that He died to save us from our sins, but why was His life necessary? Wasn't there some other way?

To understand why, we need to review our relationship with God, we who are the created to God who is the Creator. So first, we need to realize that God is holy, and this is especially hard for us to grasp because we don't have very many holy things left in our society. Consequently, we don't know how to act in the presence of holy people or holy things or when we are in holy places.

[I see this all the time now at funerals when people come who never go to Church otherwise. Men wear their hats. Others bring in coffee or pop. Many just wear their regular work clothes. No one thinks to say a pray for the deceased. That's because they don't know how to act in a holy place.]

Anyhow, we see evidence of God's holiness in our second reading when Moses encountered God in the burning bush. At that time, God instructed Moses on how to behave. He said, come no further, stay where you are. The place where you are is holy and so too is even the ground on which you stand. So take off your shoes out of respect for where you are. When God called to Moses, it says that **"Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God."**

That is the kind of respect we should maintain in our Churches because we are in a holy place. We are in the house of God. We are before our Lord Jesus Christ present in the most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

Now, with an understanding of the absolute holiness of God, and then being mindful of the fact that we creatures made by God, we can begin to grasp how terrible a thing sin is and how serious are its consequences. You see, at its core, sin is the rebellion of a limited and finite creature against the all-holy God, and it has severe consequences.

When our first parents, Adam and Eve sinned, they lost for themselves and for us the grace God had given them, sanctifying grace. Consequently, it became impossible for anyone to enter into heaven and be with God. Furthermore, their sin was not the only sin. All of us have sinned as well. So, we have added to their offense. By our own personal sins we too have rejected the grace of God, the gift of His very life for us.

As I mentioned, Sin is nothing more than an act of rebellion by an insignificant creature against an all holy and infinite God. So how could we make up for our sins? The answer is we can't. There is nothing we can give to God which He has not already give us, and this explains why God sent His Son to save us.

God sent His Son to become man, to become one of us, so that He could offer His life for us. Saint Augustine put it this way. He said, "God became man so that He could die so that we might live."

As man, Jesus could offer to His heavenly Father a most perfect sacrifice, the only acceptable and appropriate sacrifice for our sins, and that sacrifice was His life. In fact, nothing less could make up for our sins committed against an infinite God.

That, then, is why our Lord had to die for us. Because His life was the only thing in the universe holy enough to offer to the Father in reparation for our sins.

Now, we can see how great is the Father's love for us. The infinite and all-holy God created us for Himself. He wants us to live with Him forever in heaven. That was His plan. Our sins upset that plan, but even then, God loved us so much, He cared for us so much, that He willingly sent His Son to die for us that we might be saved.

So, with these thoughts in mind, as we gaze upon the cross, we have a choice to make. We can either serve God or rebel against Him. We can either produce the fruit of good works or we can produce rotten fruit. For both there will be consequences.

In our holy gospel, Jesus speaks of the man whose tree produced no fruit. The owner said to his gardener, cut it down. **"For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. So cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?"**

But the gardener said, **"leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down."**

That tree represents each of us. The gardener is Christ and the owner is the Father. The water and fertilizer are the teachings of Christ. Christ pleads for us before His heavenly Father. He intercedes on our behalf.

On hearing these words, and as we gaze upon the cross and consider the sufferings Jesus endured on our behalf, and as we think about how much God loves us, let us ask ourselves, "Have we born fruit? Have we followed Christ's commands to love God and our neighbor?"

As we also recall the part we have played in Christ's death on the Cross, let us resolve to amend our lives, to confess our sins, and to never sin again, but instead to bear fruit that we might live with God in heaven forever. Amen.