

3rd Sunday of Lent
March 7, 2010
“Another Day - Another Chance”

Today’s Gospel about the fig tree may seem a bit odd to us, my friends.

It’s because most of us here in Erie don’t cultivate fig trees, and most of us don’t have gardeners.

So let’s substitute a rose bush, instead.

And let’s say we planted it three years ago, and so far it has not produced a single rose.

We might just as likely dig it out and replace it with a new one.

Well, whether figs or roses, the point of today’s Gospel is that God does not give up on us.

With the morning of each day, God gives us one more chance to get life right.

Second, and third and fourth and all that come after them are each a new beginning.

And just by the fact that He lets us wake up still down here on earth, we know He’s giving us one more chance.

And that’s really exciting, when we think about it.

Sometimes we let ourselves get so bogged down with our personal faults and failings, and instead of letting them transfigure and transform us, as we talked about last week, by teaching us lessons for the future, we let these negatives get us depressed and discouraged.

Then we’re hardly any good to ourselves or anybody else around us.

Instead, we should start each morning with these prayerful words: “One more day to make God’s ways my ways.”

See the difference in life’s direction that takes us?

Rather than being glum and gloomy about what the day may hold out for us, we can greet each morning with a sense of adventure and gratitude.

Now, we get ourselves into some trouble here when we start playing the odds.

The orchard owner in today’s Gospel wanted to yank the tree on the spot.

It was the gardener, who is the Jesus figure in this story, who pleads for just one more try, one more chance.

You and I know that odds are we've got quite a few more tries and more chances in the bunch more days we're likely to have left in life on this earth.

But we also know that, in truth, we just can never know for sure just how many more daily chances we have.

So, the point is that it's not God's mercy that runs out, it's our time that runs out.

Sooner or later there will come the moment when the Father will say "Your job here on earth is done."

So whatever repenting we need to do, we should do it now, this year, this Lent, not because God is losing patience, but with the proverbial "second chance" each day brings, we lose an opportunity if we waste it.

There's another aspect to this "Another Day - Another Chance" consideration.

It's about hope.

Every athlete knows about this.

One more try at one's game brings the hope of success - even if it gets to the point of what we Cleveland Browns fans are left with: "There's always next year!"

But this hope in another day's chance gets very personal and touches us all very individually.

Some of you might remember the wonderful Msgr. Bill Hastings, a beloved pastor down at Holy Rosary for some years.

Sometimes when people first met him, they thought he was a little gruff.

But it didn't take much to see that he was a real softie.

He was so popular among the priests and sisters back in the turbulent 1970's that Bishop Watson made him Vicar General of the Erie Diocese and vicar for priests for and sisters, too.

That last job was really important because of all the turmoil back then, people, priests, and sisters trying to adjust to a new Church after Vatican II, with some not being able to make the adjustment and others frustrated over the changes not going far enough.

As I think about it, those times in the Church were a lot like the political polarities we see in Congress today.

At any rate, Msgr. Hastings was the “go-to” guy who was trying to hold everyone and everything together.

One day, in the midst of all this, he and another priest were in a car stopped for the red light at 12th and State.

As they were waiting for the light to change, an elderly man with a cane hobbled across in front of them, trying his best to get to the other side before the light changed.

Msgr. Hastings voiced this observation to the other priest in the car, and he said: “After all, isn’t that what we all want, is just another chance?”

When that story was told at Msgr.’s funeral in 1982 many of us there at his Mass, who had received his soft, shepherd’s care, taking our concerns to the bishop for us, consoling us, and giving us hope for our futures, when we heard that story, we broke up. And I was one of them.

So, the Gospel lesson from the barren fig tree, reprieved by a patient gardener, is indeed: another day of life is another hope-filled chance to get it all right.

Thank you, and God bless you.