

Third Sunday of Lent, Year C, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Third Sunday of Lent—Year C

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for the session, read all the readings.

Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15

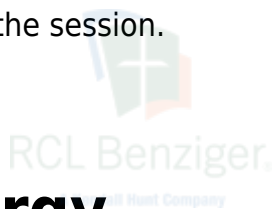
Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11

1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

Luke 13:1-9

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading that appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.



The Word In Liturgy

On the first two Sundays of Lent, all three years of the lectionary cycle focus on important events in the life of Jesus: the temptation in the desert (Lent 1) and the transfiguration (Lent 2). However, for the next three Sundays, each year has its own particular focus. This year, C, looks at penance and reconciliation. Today's readings reveal a God who is merciful and forgiving, patiently calling us to conversion. Next week the focus is on the experience of reconciliation, expressed in the story of the prodigal son; and, on the fifth Sunday, the readings point to the new life made possible for us because of God's forgiveness, symbolized in Jesus' words to the woman caught in adultery.

Today's reading from the book of Exodus is one of the most widely known and one of the most important passages in the entire Bible. In this pivotal section, God reveals the divine name to the Jewish people in the person of Moses, a privilege previously denied even to the patriarch Jacob (Gen. 32:30). Despite the enigmatic character of that name ("I am who am"), God is identified as one who is filled with compassion ("I have witnessed the affliction of my people"). God is further revealed as the very one who has acted in the history of the people time and again ("God of your ancestors . . . Abraham . . . Isaac . . . Jacob"), who now wishes



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to “come down to rescue,” and who will remain with the people “for all generations.”

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the fig tree, both to stress the urgency of repentance, and to remind his hearers of how patient God has been while calling us to conversion. The fig tree, long a symbol of God’s chosen people (Hosea 9:10, Jeremiah 8:13), is not cut down, as would have been the usual practice after being barren for three years. Instead, it gets extra care for one more year and another chance to “bear fruit.” Jesus’ call to repentance was central to his preaching and to his ministry. The “good news” of that call is that ours is a God who does forgive, in fact who welcomes our repentance and who sends a savior to offer us personally the gift of reconciliation.

Catholic Doctrine

“The Lord is kind and merciful.”—God’s nature revealed.

Catholicism, like Judaism, believes that something of the nature of God has been revealed to us through God’s actions in history, chronicled in the pages of sacred scripture. For example, God discloses the divine name to Moses, saying, “I am who am.” This is not exactly a name. And yet how does one identify utter mystery? A burning bush that does not burn up is the phenomenon that attracts Moses. A name that is not a name discloses and reveals a God who is mystery and compassion. This God is faithful to the promises first made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and will save their descendants from slavery and bondage.

In Jesus we find the full revelation of a God who is merciful and forgiving. The very name Jesus, means “God saves” in Hebrew. In delivering Israel from slavery into the promised land, God not only brought them out of Egypt but also saves his people from sin. All salvation history is recapitulated in Jesus. Indeed, the only Son of God, the Savior, epitomizes divine mercy and kindness.

Today’s Gospel contains a parable illustrating the kindness and mercy of God. Jesus himself has been described as “the parable of God” among us. His teaching and preaching, his life and death, point to the loving God who “is always ready to forgive” even though “time and time again” the covenant was broken. God does not abandon sinners.

Indeed, every time the Church gathers to celebrate, it is gathered by the loving kindness of God and frequently recalls this initiative of God in the Introductory Rites. Thus, the Penitential Rite of the Mass is less focused on our sinfulness and need for penance and more directed toward a proclamation of the mercy, love, and newness of life achieved for us through the Lord Jesus.

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