

32nd Week After Pentecost – Tuesday

The text of the scriptures, followed by short reflections.

James 3:1-10 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

Mark 11:11-23 And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve. And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it. And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine. And when even was come, he went out of the city. And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

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Why did our Lord curse the fig tree?



Nothing that our Lord did was superfluous, or unplanned. He cursed a barren fig tree precisely to give an opportunity the following day to teach us about faith.

Isn't it marvelous how the Lord so often did not directly answer a question, but instead used it as an opportunity to teach something? He does not directly answer Peter's implied question, but instead teaches about faith, in that delicious, mysterious way of His.

“Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.”

He gives such words of hope! He tells us, that with faith, we will move the mountain; this is not a windswept piece of rock and earth; it is our sins! “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.” (Mat 19:26, Mark 10:27)

What was Peter's question, and did the Lord actually answer it? Indirectly, yes; Peter marveled that the Lord cursed a tree that could not be faulted for not having fruit, because “the time of figs was not yet”

The context of the story makes it clear that the barren fig tree represents the barrenness of the Jews¹.

¹ "He withers the tree, then, in order to chasten men. The disciples marvel, and with good reason. For the fig tree contains a great amount of sap, and so the fact that it withered immediately serves all the more to indicate the miracle. The fig

This is important to understand, but to only understand the story in this way is to miss the most important point.

The fig tree is our soul, and there is *no time* when our soul is not required to bear fruit. Let us not “make excuse with excuses in sins”, and placate ourselves with the knowledge of our infirmities and believe that somehow this excuses us from bearing fruit. The Lord emphatically rebukes this idea by exhorting us to have faith in God, and not look at things with carnal eyes. A mountain cannot be moved, and a fig tree cannot bear fruit in the winter, but with God's help, we not only can bear fruit at all times, and move a mountain, but we must!

Our Lord's teachings were oil and wine, soothing, comforting, and also frightening and harsh. (Cf. Luke 10:25-37) All at once, His promise that we can move a mountain with faith, and bear fruit even in the winter of our soul is both oil and wine. We should tremble when we look upon our tree, which has all that is needed to bear fruit, and yet the branches are so empty; the Lord will not tolerate such a state of affairs, and He will not countenance any of our feeble excuses! How can we fulfill such an arduous task? With faith, and with God, if we try.

In another place, the Lord promises us that He does not require perfection from us all at once, by telling the parable of the fig tree:

“Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? {8} And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: {9} And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.” (Luke 13:7-9)

We have a short time while in this life to produce fruit; only the Lord knows how long. Inexorably, there will come the day when the Lord, hungry to partake of our fruit, will come to our tree – if we have faith in God, and struggle, it will not be barren!

tree means the synagogue of the Jews, which has only leaves, that is, the visible letter of the law, but not the fruit of the Spirit. But also every man who gives himself over to the sweetness of the present life is likened to a fig tree, who has no spiritual fruit to give to Jesus who is hungry for such fruit, but only leaves, that is, temporal appearances which fall away and are gone. This man, then, hears himself cursed. For Christ says, Go, ye accursed, into the fire. But he is also dried up; for as he roasts in the flame, his tongue is parched and withered like that of the rich man of the parable, who in his life had ignored Lazarus." Blessed Theophylact, Commentary on Matthew)

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