

March 23, 2025 – Third Sunday in Lent

***Return to the Lord our God* by Pastor Julio Romero**

Gospel: Luke 13:1-9

There is a story I read about two men who went moose hunting in Canada. A bush pilot dropped them off at their camp and arranged to pick them up in one week. Both men shot a moose. When the pilot returned, he saw the two moose hanging and said, "I can't take these back. It's too much weight for the plane. We'll never get off the ground."

The two hunters looked at each other, and one of them said, "We really want to bring these moose home. It will be fine. Last year, we came up here and shot two moose the same size as these. The pilot who picked us up had a plane just like yours, and he managed to get off the ground."

The pilot replied, "Well, if you did it last year, we'll try it again." So, they loaded up the two moose and began taxiing down the runway.

The plane barely made it off the ground, clipped some trees, and crashed. About fifteen minutes later, the hunters regained consciousness. One of them turned to the other and asked, "Where are we?"

He looked around and answered, "Oh, I think we made it about two hundred yards farther than we did last year."

This humorous story carries an important lesson: In order to live our future differently, we need to learn from our past mistakes. If we continue making the same mistakes, expecting different results, we are headed for trouble.

Sometimes, we must change direction if we want a different outcome. This concept is closely related to repentance, which means changing direction or, as someone put it very simply, "Repentance means we tell God, 'You are right, and we are wrong.'"

As we continue on our Lenten journey, it is expected that we reflect on the need to change direction—to repent and tell God that He is right and we are wrong. He is right in wanting to make this world loving, caring, and peaceful. He is right in guiding us away from selfishness and back on the right path that leads to Him. He calls us to move away from things that makes us less than the person God wants us to be.

Repentance doesn't happen by our own will; we need God to complete the work of repentance in our lives. We need God to take our hands, guide us, and open our eyes to our mistakes so that we can admit that God is right and we are wrong. Without His help, we will continue down the same wrong path, expecting good results until, eventually, we crash.

Today's Gospel urges us to repent and change direction as quickly as we can, because we don't if today may be our last. A teacher was once asked, "When should a person repent?" He replied, "Repent on the last day of your life." The students responded, "But we don't know when that will be." And the teacher said, "Then repent now."

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells two stories: one about people who died at the hands of Pontius Pilate and his army, and another about those who perished when the tower of Siloam fell on them. None of these people had the chance to repent—they didn't all have that extra day, they didn't get another opportunity to bear the fruits of the Gospel. What caught my attention is what Jesus said after these tragedies: "Unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

What Jesus means is that no one is exempt from the need to repent. None of us—here or outside these walls—can go without admitting our faults, repenting, and changing direction. Jesus urges us to begin today, because tomorrow may be too late.

This reminds me of the truth that we all have unfinished business. We must make amends for our mistakes, reconcile with those we have wronged, and make peace with ourselves for the wrongs we have done. We can't afford to put it off because there may not be a tomorrow.

C.S. Lewis once said, "A Christian is not one who never goes wrong, but one who is enabled to repent and begin over again after each stumble because of the inner working of Christ." This reminds us that for genuine repentance, we need Christ in our lives. He is the one who forgives our sins, and through His forgiveness, we can change direction and bear fruit worthy of God's kingdom, unafraid of being cut down like a fruitless tree.

Without repentance, we are like the fig tree in today's parable. For three years, the fig tree didn't bear fruit, even though it shared the same ground, care, fertilizer, light, and water as the surrounding grapevines. The owner of the vineyard was ready to get rid of the tree, but the caretaker suggested giving it one more year to see if it would bear fruit. The owner agreed.

This is where God's grace is revealed: in the gift of extra time, in the waiting, in the year of the Lord's favor. We are here today, and we have today to repent. Each day is a gift—an opportunity to turn back to God—because tomorrow might be too late.

God is waiting for us, just as the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son waited by the window every day, hoping to see his son return home. That's how I see God today—waiting for us to come to Him. The first step to reunion and embrace is repentance—to choose the narrow road that leads to Him.

May the Holy Spirit help us with our works of repentance and make us realize that if we continue down the same path, expecting a different result, we will eventually crash. And that day may be today, as Jesus warns us. It is by God's grace that we are here today, so let's use it to produce the fruit of repentance. **Amen.**