



The Catholic Cathedral of The Immaculate Conception

PARISH BULLETIN & NEWSLETTER



September 2021 (Year B) Vol. XIX No. 9

The Parable of the barren Fig Tree and our dreams

by Rev. Gregoire Vignola, PME

In the Gospel of Luke (13, 6-9), we can find a lovely small parable, **the parable of the barren fig tree**, in which we see how a kind gardener, because of his dedicated work and care, succeeded in upholding the existence of a fig tree and restoring its dignity in spite of its unproductivity in the last three years. The contrast in this parable is between the attitude of the vineyard owner and that of his gardener.

We have to acknowledge that such a contrast of attitudes towards people with limitations of any kind is still widely existing in our society. For many people, those in our society with limitations or disabilities, those unproductive, should not have a place and do not deserve any care. In the parable, this is the **attitude of the vineyard owner**. His order to cut down the fig tree, because it is just taking up a place and exhausting the soil in vain. This is the attitude of a man who does not care about the tree itself. The only thing that interests him is the final product, the figs, the fruits. Chopping down the tree was the only easy option for him. **The attitude of the gardener** is very different. He is a tenderer of fruit trees. Still better, he is a lover of the fruit tree. He had cared about the little tree, he had sacrificed himself for it, and he is ready to continue to do it. In his eyes, it is what makes the true value of the tree, namely the care he shows to it.

The gardener's point of view is the right one. A person becomes precious to us, not only because of what we get out of that person, but also because of what we put into him or her, because of the time we give him or her, and because of the care we show to him or her. In the "Little Prince" of Saint-Exupéry, the fox tells the little Prince: *"It is the time you spend on your rose that makes your rose unique and so important"*.

In the parable of the barren fig tree, **the owner's way was the way of the head** rather than of the heart. It was the way of power rather than of love. Power is only interested in results, and wants them immediately. Power has no patience with the slow and no sympathy for the weak. **The gardener's way was the way of love.** Love is patient and kind. Love does not give up easily. Love does not force, but encourages and waits. It is not because a man has a fruitless past that he cannot have a future. It is not because someone has limitations that he has no dignity. So we must learn to be patient and lenient. The real message of this parable is that God is patient with sinners.

Furthermore we cannot forget that the history of the Church is full of examples of "fig trees" which were once barren, but which in due time became fruitful. St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius of Loyola are just a few notable examples.

Now, in order to nourish and deepen our reflection, I would like to extrapolate about something that is not developed in the parable itself. What I mean is **the wish, the expectation and the dream of the fig tree itself**. We have heard about the dream of the gardener, but not about the dream of the fig tree itself. So in a special way, I want to stress this point, because I feel that it is important to have dreams. We can say that as long as we have dreams, we are still living, but as soon as we stop dreaming, we start dying. I will do it by sharing a beautiful story about **the dreams of three little trees**, a story that will help us to understand that, at this difficult and challenging time in Hong Kong, our personal dreams and the dreams for our city are not necessarily crushed forever, and can still find implementation in due time, even though maybe not exactly as we would have expected it.

(continued on Pg. 2)

Here is that story. Once upon a mountain top, three little trees were standing and dreaming of what they wanted to become when they grew up. **The first little tree** looked up at the stars and said: “I want to hold a treasure. I want to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones. So I will be the most precious and beautiful treasure box in the world”. **The second little tree** looked out at the small stream, trickling by on its way to the ocean, and said: “I want to be travelling on mighty waters and carrying powerful kings. I will be the strongest ship in the world”. **The third little tree** looked down into the valley below, where busy men and women worked in a busy town, and said: *“I do not want to leave the mountain top at all. I want to grow so tall that when people stop to look at me, they will raise their eyes to heaven and think of God. I will be the tallest tree in the world”.*

Then years and years passed. The rain came, the sun shone, and the little trees grew tall. But one day, some wood-cutters climbed the mountain, and all three trees were felled. **The first tree** was brought to a carpenter’s shop. But the carpenter fashioned it into a feed-box for animals. So the once beautiful tree was not covered with gold or treasure, but was covered with dust and filled with hay for hungry farm animals. **The second tree** was taken to a shipyard, but no mighty sailing ship was made that day. Instead the once strong tree was cut and hammered into a simple fishing boat. He was too small to sail to an ocean or even a river; instead he was taken to a little lake. **The third tree** was a bit confused when the woodcutter left him in a timber-yard. *“What has happened?”* he asked. *“All I ever wanted was to stay on the mountain top and point to God”.*

Then many days and nights passed to the point that the three trees nearly forgot their dreams. But one night, under the light of a star, a young woman placed her new-born baby into a feed-box for animals. It was Christmas Day. **And suddenly the first tree knew he was holding the greatest treasure in the world.**

Another evening, a tired traveller and his friends crowded into a fishing boat. The traveller fell asleep as they sailed out into the lake. Suddenly a big storm arose. The boat suffered under the strain. Then the tired man awakened, stood up, stretched out his hand, and calmed the storm saying: “Peace, be still!” **And suddenly the second tree knew he was carrying the king of heaven and earth.**

Another Friday morning, the third tree was surprised when its beams were taken out from the forgotten woodpile. Then he was carried through an angry crowd. He was shaken and trembled when soldiers nailed a man’s hands to him. It was Good Friday. Then the following Sunday, when the sun rose and the earth trembled with joy below him, **the third tree knew that God’s love had changed everything.** It had made the third tree strong. And every time people thought of the third tree transformed into a cross, they would think of God and of his love. **The third tree understood that it was much better, and a much better position than just being the tallest tree in the world.**

From this beautiful story, we can see clearly that the original dreams of the three little trees, even though a bit exaggerated at the beginning, succeeded at the end to correspond, to encounter and to implement the plan and the dream of God on each of them. **Is it possible for us to have the same wish and the same hope regarding our personal dreams and the dreams about the future of our beloved city, Hong Kong?** May our dreams also match and encounter the plan of God on us and on our beloved city. Because this will be the necessary condition to reach, to enjoy and to share with others around us the true destiny and the true happiness that God dreams for each one of us.





Liturgy of the Word

Scripture Readings for September 2021 (Year B)

Twenty-third Sunday of the Year – 5 September 2021

First Reading (Is 35:4-7). The prophet urges the people to take courage, because God is coming to save his people.

Second Reading (Jas 2:1-5). Class distinction should have no place among Christians.

Gospel (Mk 7:31-37). Jesus cures a Gentile man who is deaf and has a speech impediment.

Twenty-fourth Sunday of the Year – 12 September 2021

First Reading (Is 50:5-9). The just person is sustained in all his trials by the firm belief that God is with him.

Second Reading (Jas 2:14-18). Faith without good works is dead.

Gospel (Mk 8:27-35). Even though Peter declares his belief in Jesus as the Messiah, he has no idea what that implies.

Twenty-fifth Sunday of the Year – 19 September 2021

First Reading (Wis 2:12.17-20). The godless plot to do away with the just one, because his blameless life is a reproach to them.

Second Reading (Jas 3:16-4:3). Jealousy, ambition, and self-seeking lead to disharmony and fighting. Gentleness, reasonableness, and mercy lead to peace.

Gospel (Mk 9:30-37). Jesus tells his apostles that he will suffer bitter humiliation and death, and says that true greatness shows itself in service towards the weaker members of the community.

Twenty-sixth Sunday of the Year – 26 September 2021

First Reading (Num 11:25-29). Joshua resents the fact that the gift of prophecy is now given to many others besides Moses, but Moses himself welcomes it.

Second Reading (Jas 5:1-6). We hear a strong condemnation of wealth, especially when it is obtained through exploitation of the weak.

Gospel (Mk 9:38-43.45.47-48). This contains a lesson in tolerance and in the avoidance of scandal and occasions of sin.

✠ **SUNDAY MASS in ENGLISH** — 9:30 a.m. **Rev. Gregoire Vignola, PME** (Assistant Parish Priest)

✠ **For Parish information** — **Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception:** www.cathedral.catholic.org.hk

Tel: +852-25228212, Fax: +852-25217957, Email: cathedral@catholic.org.hk



Praying for the Pope's Monthly Intention (September 2021)

An environmentally sustainable lifestyle

We pray that we all will make courageous choices for a simple and environmentally sustainable lifestyle, rejoicing in our young people who are resolutely committed to this.



MEDITATION SPIRITUAL

by "Friends of the Way"

We prayerfully read and reflect on a very important *revelation* of Jesus. He surprises us by calling us "no longer his servants, but his friends." Can this truth be experienced as a fact in our daily lives?

LIVING THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

How God's Grace Can Transform Your World



1. READ: (John 15:14-17):

"I do not call you servants, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but *I have called you friends*, because I have *made known to you everything* that I have heard from my Father... You did not choose me but *I chose you*. And I appointed you to *go and bear fruit*, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may *love one another*."

2. REFLECT:

a) "*I have called you friends!*" How Jesus must have longed to have close friends, and not just admirers, or worse still, "servants!". Crowds followed him as a Teacher and Healer and Miracle-worker, wanting to get some "favour" from him. Perhaps even Martha was satisfied to be just a servant to such a famous visitor. But Jesus is looking for human friendship. He greatly desires to be our Friend. Friendship involves a lot of communication and sharing of personal experiences with the other. This was the case with Mary, the sister of Martha, who was content to sit at Jesus' feet and give time to listening to him. Friendship with Jesus starts with Jesus, but our response is all-important. He said (to all whom he calls to friendship with him), "*I chose you!*" And Mary is one who responded, even braving the complaints of her flustered sister!

b) To grow in friendship with Jesus who has chosen us, to know what Jesus wants to share with us, we too must give time to sitting at his feet. This means, prayerfully becoming familiar with His word in the New Testament: "*I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.*" Why were we born? What is our role in life? How do we face suffering? What must we do for God and his Kingdom? All this Jesus will share with us personally, through our "Sacred Reading" or Lectio Divina, he will make the written word of God come alive for us, indeed, his words will bring us "spirit and life" (Jn 6:63) in new ways as we grow in his friendship.

TATION

and LIFE!

Word “—Bulletin no.1

c) Jesus says in our passage of today, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” Jesus' call of friendship is a call to love. Further, he explains, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15). But our Friend Jesus knows our weakness, he himself said, “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:41). That is why his Spirit is needed to be given to us, Jesus' Spirit of strength and courage and wisdom and love. It is by the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, AND by the word of God, that we will receive Jesus' Spirit. The teachings of the Church in the Second Vatican Council assure us:

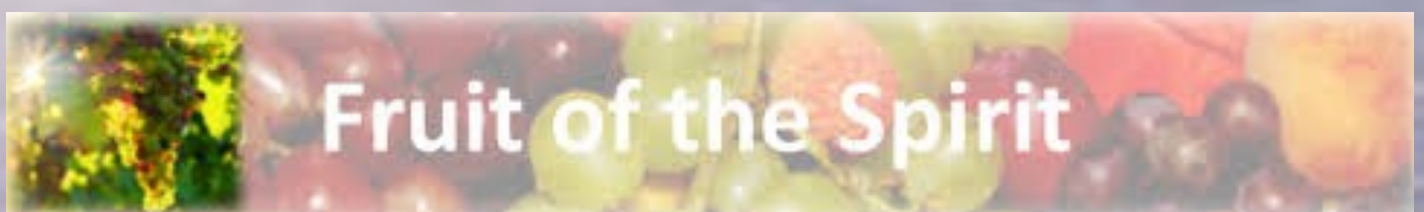
“Such is the infinite power of the word of God that it can serve the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life...” Just as from constant attendance at the Eucharist the life of the Church draws increase, so a new impulse of spiritual life may be expected from increased devotion to the word of God” (Dei Verbum, n.21, 26).

d) Ask yourself: Has the Spirit revealed to me my own identity as a chosen “friend” of Jesus? If yes, was this a life-changing awareness of becoming both a friend of Jesus and a beloved child of God the Father? If not yet, invite the Spirit of Jesus to come TODAY to make our Scripture text fill you with “spirit and life” and give meaning and direction to your life.

e) As you experience the word of God touching your life today, take a moment to respond to Jesus with a spontaneous prayer of praise and commitment to remain in him at all times.

ACTION: “go and bear fruit, fruit that will last!”

Make a decision right now about how you will promote a real friendship with Jesus. Read this same passage everyday for a whole month and let it deepen your personal experience of Jesus, of his and our Father, and of the Holy Spirit. And let the wonders of friendship with Jesus overflow to your life.



29th of May 2021

First Holy Communion and Confirmation



CONFIRMANDS

Cathedral (12 in total)

Aodhan BAYNES
Brandon LEUNG
Duncan WONG
Isaac TEDJA
Joanna HILL
Josephine CHEN
Josephine TIMPANY
Julian LIM
Nathan WU
Nicole WU
Patrick O'HEARN
Sophie LO



German community
(9 in total)

Andreas VUKOVICH
Frederick DA SILVA
Julia IBELE
Julian ZIMMER
Justus BERG
Philine KOTANKO
Sebastian DA SILVA
Timea PERONACE
Timo ARNOLD



FIRST HOLY COMMUNICANTS

Cathedral (21 in total)

Abigail KO
Alexandre BOUTOT
Anthony WONG
Alexis LEE
Callum McENTEE
Colton PIGOTT
Eva MIN
Gabriella HSU
Hank CHA
Harry RUDGE
Leila HAQUE

Meredith ZHENG
Miles SELNER
Nicole CHONG
Noah HAQUE
Patrick DOHERTY
Roxane TO
Scarlett PLUNKETT
Thomas KOLLAR
Valeria CHOW
William RUDGE



Treasuring the little ones

Jesus warned those who would lead the little ones astray, but he blessed those who care for them. One of the most touching things about children is their openness leaves them extremely vulnerable. They may not say much but they feel everything. They are like crocuses which appear in the open in February – frail, delicate, beautiful creatures – innocents abroad in an unpredictable climate. If they are embraced by the sun, they will bloom to their full potential. But if they are assailed by hail, they die a premature death. Love is to a child what sunshine is to a flower.

Fr. Flor McCarthy SDB



On Children

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
and though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
for they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
for even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.

Kahlil Gibran – poet and philosopher

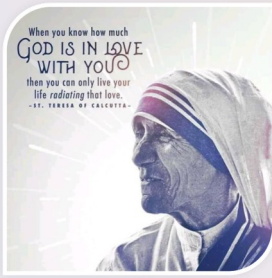
PARISH PRAYER

God our Father, bless our Parish so that we may love you more.
Help our parents to give good example to their children and our youth to grow in strength as good Christians.
Encircle our families with your loving care.
To the sick grant health, to the aged bring serenity and to those in sorrow, joy.
May each parishioner grow stronger in faith,
and may our love for one another become deeper in our daily living.
We make our prayer through Christ our Lord.
Amen.



REFLECTIONS

Feast of St. Teresa of Calcutta ✝ 5th September



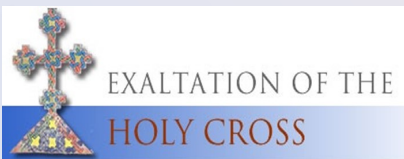
On 4th September 2016, the date that celebrates the Jubilee of Workers and Volunteers of Mercy, Pope Francis canonized Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta. This canonization came before the 19th anniversary of her death on 5th September 1997.

Feast of Nativity of Blessed Virgin Mary ✝ 8th September



"Let us celebrate with joy the birth of the Virgin Mary, of whom was born the Sun of Justice.... Her birth constitutes the hope and the light of salvation for the whole world.... Her image is light for the whole Christian people"

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross ✝ 14th September



"The tree of Genesis brings sin and death;
The tree of the cross brings mankind's second chance."

Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows ✝ 15th September



*Mother, who didst stand by Him whilst
He hung upon the cross, pray for us.
Mother, who didst receive Him into thine arms
when He was dead, pray for us.
Mother, who didst see Him buried in the tomb, pray for us.*

Feast of Archangels: Sts. Michael, Gabriel & Raphael ✝ 29th September



*Prayer to St. Michael:
St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle.
Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou,
O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God,
thrust into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits,
who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.*