

3rd Sunday of Lent

The first readings of Lent survey Old Testament history. This year we've already heard about Abraham, and today we hear about the burning bush, which launched the mission of Moses. At this time Moses was recently married. His father-in-law Jethro gave him a job tending his flock. On one ordinary day, approaching Mount Horeb, Moses noticed an extraordinary sight: flames shooting from a green bush. Out of curiosity, he walked over for a closer look.

Moses' own people were enslaved, forced into labor, enduring ethnic prejudice. The unjust condition of the Israelites had become too much for God. The Lord chose Moses for a task and used a common bush on a normal day to pique Moses' curiosity and draw him onto a different path.

Moses walked closer. A voice commanded him to remove his sandals in the presence of the God of his ancestors. Moses' eyes had lured him toward the bush, but now he shielded his eyes because "he was afraid to look at God." In a few verses, he moved from contentment to curiosity to fear. The Lord told him, "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt," as if to imply, "You have not." The Lord needed Moses' attention not just on the bush, but on the suffering of his people. He sent Moses back to the Israelites on mission.

Moses had only one question, "If they ask me, 'What is [your] name?' what am I to tell them?" According to this account, Moses was the first person to hear the name of God. Not even Abraham, Isaac and Jacob knew it. They just called God "the Almighty." But Moses heard the sacred name: "I am who am." His name declares that he alone is the living God.

As we go about our ordinary day, we focus on the tasks at hand, our faces often watching the flock of messages that roam around our devices, not the world around us. Like Moses, when we faithfully do our work, we may be oblivious to concerns that are bothering God: the suffering in Ukraine, the prevalence of human trafficking, the abuse of children under our care, the plight of the homeless in our streets, the isolation of people we love who strangely feel unloved. At the beginning of Mass, we often confess that part of our sin is "what I have failed to do"—even for our own family.

Today's reading from Exodus invites us to let curiosity bring us from the ordinary to the extraordinary, to look up from our routines and hear God's call to something else. Like Moses, we may move from contentment to curiosity to fear. We may not like what God calls us to do. Well, God may not like us letting some injustice endure.

In Lent many Catholics heighten our awareness of God by taking on some spiritual practice. Lent is a fiery bush that never burns; it makes us curious and draws our attention away from complacency, away from our desires, and onto God's call. Moses was a competent shepherd of Jethro's flock, but God called him to shepherd a more important flock of afflicted people. Lent reminds us where our eyes belong.

My brothers and sisters, whenever we come to church, our curiosity has drawn us into the presence of God. Here he tells us his name. Here he speaks to our heart. Here he sends us like Moses on mission.