

## **Third Sunday of Lent – Cycle C**

### **Fifth Anniversary and Memorial of St. Katharine Drexel**

**March 6-7, 2010**

**Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15; *Romans 12: 2-3*; Luke 13: 1-9.**

**Today's first reading from the Book of Exodus sets the stage for our other readings and the backdrop of our anniversary celebration as a community of faith and indeed our journey this Lent.**

**Moses is tending the flocks. He sees a burning bush which is not consumed, and he hears his name called out from the blaze. When Moses responds, "Here I am," he is warned to "come no nearer." The spot on which he stands is holy ground. He encounters the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who has come to rescue his people. Yet Moses is hesitant: "If they ask me 'what is his name?' what am I to tell them?" God says, "I Am who am. This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you. This is my name forever. This is my title for all generations."**

**This section of Exodus begins an account of the relationship between God and the Israelites. Their God will be a God of free covenant, A God who personally intervenes to save them. "I AM will always be with them." This too is our God – God who calls us into being, God who creates, redeems and sustains that which he loves, and God who is forever in relationship to and with us. The God who is existence itself is the giver and gift of all gifts. God is the cause of all that is.**

**Certainly there are many ways for human beings to encounter God. But tellingly, God came not just to Moses, not just to Abraham, not just to Isaac or Jacob but through them God came into relationship with all the Israelites, God desired to save a community of people who were his own. Then "in the fullness of time" as the Scriptures put it God came himself in the person of Jesus Christ to share in our humanity, to call all the people to new life and freedom. Jesus formed a community and through sending his Apostles and disciples out in his name he desired that the "holy ground" of our encounter with God be in and through the community of "the people of God," the Church.**

**And so for us, in this time, the momentous opportunity set before us to encounter God, to experience “holy ground” is in the Church - the universal community of God’s people, but even more intimately for us as members of the local Church of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis our particular “holy ground” is the Catholic Community of Saint Katharine Drexel. I will never forget what Father Timothy Nolan told Sister Dianne and me early on when SKD first began. We spent time talking with a number of priest’s who had founded parishes and in our conversation with him he shared a statement born of his deep faith and it stirred my heart with tremendous hope. “God has had it in mind for all time that this parish, St. Katharine Drexel should exist.”**

**God always desires a response to his initiative. He called Moses and expected that Moses would respond and lead the Israelites from oppression to freedom. Jesus called and sent the apostles and expected a response in the living of their lives for the sake of the Gospel and the furthering of the Kingdom of God. What is our response to God’s call for us to be this community of faith – here and now in this place?**

**First, let me say that the response of the members of SKD over our first five years has been tremendous and passionate, in so many ways and on so many levels. From involvement in the many ministries within the parish (over 70% of our registered members are involved in one or more ministry as volunteers – that is huge), to the unbelievable yet absolutely tangible example of so many giving their time and effort to create our new expanded space so our community can gather under one roof, to the youth reaching beyond here to the wider church and the people of God in need through the summer Mission trips, to the many ways members of SKD have become involved in giving of themselves for the sake of others be that Meals on Wheels, our efforts to help families in need at Christmas or the amazing response monthly to help stock food shelves for the sake of others, or the new effort beginning in collaboration with Lord of Life Church to help house the homeless or through those who will help with the other local churches to visit and bring Communion to Catholics in the local hospitals,**

**To the consistent commitment to personally grow in faith and share that experience in an inner-generational way through Generations of Faith – part of our commitment to Life-long Faith Formation. Those are only a few, but they are real – they are signs of the Holy Spirit within us and among us and witness our commitment in faith.**

**But what is even deeper and what is essential to underpin the external expressions of our faith and our belonging is the personal response each of us must make to God’s call for us to be in relationship with Him – God who desires to be the very ground of our being; and thus the call of LENT.**

**What does Lent invite us to? In the words of our second reading for this anniversary celebration – *“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.”* (Romans 12:2-3) It is essentially a call to conversion, to repentance and it is ongoing for us – not just today, not just this Lent but always so that more and more we conform ourselves “not to this age” but to Christ. It is the fundamental invitation made to everyone; it is about embracing more and more what our Baptism into Christ means and hopefully that invitation will for each of us reach its fulfillment in eternal life.**

**The root meaning of the Greek noun for repentance (*metanoia*) means to make an about face and return, in this case to God. Repentance, or turning away from one path to another, is not so much finding God as it is being found by God. That sounds just like the experience of Moses in our first reading today – does it not? In this Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of a God who is patient and always ready to give people a second chance. In Jesus’ parable of the fig tree, the gardener pleads on behalf of the fig tree and it is granted one more year to bear fruit. The year that Jesus proclaimed earlier in Luke’s Gospel, “the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:19), would be a year of forgiveness, restoration, and second chances.**

**This parable should cause us all to wonder – what would I do if I had only a year left to live, only a short time in which to make up for the wrongs I have done and the opportunities that I’ve missed? Really – how profoundly important would that year be? We have the chance – every one of us, to do some serious fertilizing and hoeing so as to bear fruit in our lives. Can we take to heart the lesson of the fig tree and live each day as a profound gift from God? Perhaps some of us need the fertilizing that quiet time, or fasting, or spending more time in prayer, or celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation could provide. Perhaps some of us need the hoeing that forgiveness of another, or some specific acts of kindness toward someone we take for granted, or giving of our financial resources to help those in need, or giving time in service could provide. All of these say concretely that we are willing to die to self for the sake of others and that is the paradox of the parable of the fig tree. If we wish to bear fruit we must die to ourselves. The choice before us every Lent is about dying: fruitful dying to self for the sake of others. The challenge is to not get caught up in “conforming to this age” to the things of this world and this life alone but to be “transformed” for the sake of Christ, Christ’s life in us and Christ in others.**

**As we celebrate the anniversary of our founding, as we give thanks for what has been and say yes again to what can yet be, let us not forget that what will continue to sustain us the most as individuals and therefore continue to enrich and build this community into the parish that God desires it to be, is our own growth in being transformed more and more to Christ. So permit me to end by quoting Saint Katharine who is both our patron and our model for living the life of Christ.**

*“If we want, through the merits of Christ, to redeem any part of the world, it must be in following Him on the Way of the Cross, bearing our own cross after Him. The action of all actions that we have to perform is to climb the hill of Calvary with Christ. All other actions are preparatory in a way to the great essential sacrifice where Christ our Lord offers Himself daily for us, and we offer ourselves daily for Him. Let us live out our offering.”* (St. Katharine Drexel)

[A compilation of my thoughts; those of the Rev. John F. Kavanaugh, S.J. in his *The Word Engaged* Meditations on the Sunday Scriptures, Cycle C; and Art Zannoni in his *Journey Through Lent 2010* – Third Sunday of Lent (Year C).]