



Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke 13: 1-9.

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. He said to them in reply, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them— do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!" And he told them this parable: "There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none, he said to the gardener, 'For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. So cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?' He said to him in reply, 'Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down.'"

Introductory Prayer:

Lord, who am I that you spend time listening to me in my prayer? Who am I that you speak with me? You have given humanity such dignity by assuming our nature and giving me personally so many gifts. Time and time again you have been patient with me and received me back into your embrace when I have strayed from you. Thank you for your kindness to me. I hope to receive it always in the future and especially at the hour of my death. Your kindness and patience are a manifestation of your love for me. I want to return that love, because the only fitting response to love is love.

Petition:

Lord, help me to be as patient with others as you are with me.

1. The Fig-less Fig:

The owner of the fig tree in the parable, which many spiritual authors see as an image of God the Father, comes for three years in search of fruit. How often our Heavenly Father comes in search of fruit on the fig tree of our lives. And what does he find? He has given us the 'soil and so many elements that are conducive to being fruitful. He has made

known his desire for us to bear fruit, and his Son has explained to us how the fruit is to be produced. There are no excuses. Let's take notice of the lesson of the parable: When the Father comes to us looking for fruits, it is because it is the time for fruit. What will we say to the Father if he has given us ten, twenty, forty, sixty years to bear fruit but finds none? It's not just about looking nice, as a fig does. It's about bearing fruit, fruit that will last according to the Father's plan.

2. The Fig That Was Almost Toast:

There is an American idiom referring to something that is destroyed and no longer what it was: It's toast! The fig tree in the parable was in danger of becoming toast. Cut it down was the order given by the owner. Why should it exhaust the soil? What a terrible accusation! It was useless and only sapping nutrients from the soil for no purpose. When we apply this parable to our own lives, it is ghastly to think that our life, or the lives of others, might be just as useless. Cut it down. Take it away. It serves no purpose. The judgment is just. But it was a judgment that was soon to be lifted, both in the case of the fig tree and in the application to our own lives. Am I sufficiently grateful for God's continual mercy towards me and others?

3. Leave It:

Thanks to the gardener in the parable, the fig lives and is not cut down. The axe does not bite into the trunk of the fig, wrenching from it the beauty of its leaves and meandering branches. In our case, Jesus Christ the Good Gardener steps in and asks the owner, the Heavenly Father, to 'leave it; he, the Good Gardener, will take care of things. And how he does it! The Gardener himself is cut down in a bloody way and crucified. We who indeed should justly be cut down are saved, while the axe is put to the trunk of His body. All for love of us! Archbishop Luis Martinez has a beautiful image in his book, *The Secrets of the Interior Life* where he speaks of suffering as a manifestation of love: It is said that the myrrh tree allows its perfume to escape only when it is bruised. The perfume 'flows drop by drop through the lacerations of the bark that enfold them.

Conversation with Christ:

Lord Jesus Christ, how patient the Father is with me! Thank you for coming to save me, for laying your life down for me, for suffering what I should endure because of my self-centeredness and sinfulness. But with you, there is hope.

Resolution:

I will exercise patience today with everyone I meet, thinking of the patience that God has had with me.