

Three Tools

“A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any.” (Lk. 13:1-9)

One day, one of Socrates’s friends asked him, “Do you know what your friend told me about you?” Socrates said, “Wait, before telling me what my friend told you, filter that information with three different tools.” Then, Socrates elaborated on it and explained to his friend that whatever you hear, you need to scrutinize it in three different ways. First, you need to use truth and understand if the information you heard is true or false. Socrates’ friend responded saying, “No, I just heard that information.” “Well that means you do not know whether it is true or not,” said Socrates. Second, filter your information with a tool called goodness or kindness. Socrates asked his friend saying, “Do you want to say something good about your friend or not?” “No, I do not want to say anything good about my friend,” answered Socrates’s friend. “That means,” Socrates continued, “you want to say something bad about me, and you are not even sure if it is correct or not. In this case, filter your information with the last tool: the tool of necessity,” said Socrates. He asked his friend, “Is your information useful or is it necessary for me to know what you heard?” “No, it is neither necessary nor useful for you to know what I heard,” said the friend. Then, Socrates concluded by saying, “Whatever you were going to share with me is devoid of truth, goodness and benefit. Why should you tell me what you heard?”

Today’s Gospel reading and today’s story is about bearing fruit. In today’s Gospel, we read about a man who had a fig tree in his vineyard. For three years, this man had been coming to look for fruit on the fig tree, but unfortunately, he had never found any fruit on it. The Gospel says that someone told this man to cut this tree down, because the tree had never produced fruit. However, the owner of the tree wanted to keep it for another year and dig around it, fertilize it and if that would not help, he would cut it down next year.

To understand today’s story and the Gospel reading, we need to quote Christ’s words about the tree and branches. In the Gospel of John, Christ says, “I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit, apart from me you can do nothing.” (John15:5) Since we are the branches of the Vine, or Christ,

we then need to bear fruits of truth or righteousness, goodness and benefit just as the three tools of today's story. If we are not bearing fruits, then our lives are devoid of meaning and blessing.

Today, Christ calls us to bear fruit of righteousness. In the Gospel of Matthew, we read, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt. 6:33). Our primary goal then is to be righteous in all things, because the Vine itself is righteous. The one whom we call Father is righteous, and it is proper for his sons and daughters to be like him. Whatever we do or hear needs to be filtered with righteousness before being said or done. In other words, righteousness is the first tool to check our acts, words and decisions to see if we live according to today's Gospel or not. The second tool is goodness. All of our judgements or thoughts need to be filtered through goodness as well. Saint Paul instructs the Galatians saying, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10). And so, we constantly need to ask ourselves, "Do I want to do or say something good." If yes, we then do not need to worry about being cut down from the Vine or estranged from Christ's blessings. The third tool is benefit or the tool of necessity. Let us ask ourselves, are my life, acts, words useful for my spiritual life and for one another or is it necessary to help others? Yes, it is necessary as Saint Peter says, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10).

In today's Gospel, we read that the fig tree was given another year to bear fruit, and if that tree would not bear any fruit again, then the owner would cut it down. We too are given time to bear fruits of righteousness, goodness and benefit. These three tools of life are not characteristics that we are devoid of. We are given those characteristics from the beginning because we are created in the image and likeness of God. Today, as we leave this sanctuary, let us all use the tools of today's Gospel reading. These are tools that make our spiritual lives even more fruitful and bright. These are the tools that make God's image shine within us. Being the branches of Christ, we need to produce righteousness, goodness and benefit so that on the last day, we hear Christ calling us and saying, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Mt. 25:34) Amen.