

Homily, Sunday December 2, 2018

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Lessons from the fig tree.

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. (Luke 21:29-30)

I speak to you in the name of God, father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

My father is a farmer. He and every farmer in Haiti know when the seasons change not because of how nature is changing, but because of the moon. Yes, farmers like my father pay close attention to the moon and know all its phases. As for me, I still do not have any idea about such things. Therefore, instead farmers in Haiti look at all the trees as Jesus says, they look at the moon.

Talking about the fig trees, do you know that I did not understand this part of the parable until I got here last year? Do you know that this parable is difficult for Haitians? Why? Because we basically have one season every year. At this time of the year, if you go to Haiti, every tree will be green and not so different from spring. I can remember how my siblings and I used to make fun of my father when he said that in winter days are shorter and nights longer. And we would be like, wait, what? Shorter days? We learn at school that every day contains 24 hours. So, our father paid our tuition, and our pride made us think that we knew better than he did

And I can say, all Haitian high school students study the name and the changing of seasons, but understand it little because we don't experience it. When I entered the US last year, I felt what cold really was. I imagined myself coming here from my dorm without a coat. So, I see and grasp a little bit of what Jesus was saying with the parable of the fig trees. And I know a little bit when I talk with friends who are telling me some interesting facts about seasons changing, Like the way that in Alaska, the sun shines all night long for part of the year. Right now, for example, a country like Norway is in complete darkness for about three months, what they call polar night. Those facts are new to me and help me understand better this part of the Gospel.

Luke was a good writer, you know. He used specific verbs to teach us specific messages. And this is a message we can use for this season. In Matthew's gospel Jesus says “Now learn this parable from the

fig tree:” In Luke’s gospel Jesus says; “Look”. In Matthew’s gospel Jesus says; “Learn”. “Look” and “learn” seem to indicate the desire to reveal what is not yet known. The Greek expression for look; *eidon* is used over 350 times in the Gospels. It means to “see” to “perceive” “to realize” “to know”.

If we take that deeper meaning of the verb look, the one that comes from *eidon*, it changes what we see, I think. Today if you “look” at the trees that are losing their leaves, they have something valuable to teach us. One thing we need to look at is how the nature is moving like a circle. Every year we see Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter. Each brings its own qualities. In the same way, the Christian life we celebrate functions like a circle. Advent, Christmas and Epiphany that we call the incarnation cycle; then Lent and Pentecost that we call the redemption circle. So nature is teaching us that nothing is static. Life is dynamic Don’t worry about change, don’t worry because life or your life is not static. Everyone, and even I myself, would like life to be dynamic in the good things ; making new friends, eating different food everyday, having new fun and new comfort. But we also want it to be static : we want to be happy all the time, never experience hardship, have economic stability, and so on. But life just does not work that way. Change, movement, is the name of the game. So the trees are telling us not to worry. Spring is coming. Losing of their leaves is simply the way that they prepare to receive the new, just as we ourselves need to do some work to prepare for this birth of the Lord in our hearts. We must prepare for his second coming, each season, like the trees.

The second thing that the trees teach us is this : at some point, we need to look closely at what we think we know, examine things that we think we understand or some behaviors, and seek to change or improve them. “Look”at ourselves closely and try to see a different picture. That is what I could not do as a teenager who went to school and thought I knew better than my father how nature functioned because I had read it in books. I needed to let go of an impediment that prevented me from learning what nature and my parents could teach me. I humbly invite you to join me in this work. See what leaves you need to drop this Advent. Let’s do an activity together.

For example, one year, as I examined what leaves I needed to drop, I realized that I needed to leave my pride to make room for humility. And what did I do that Advent ? I wrote the word, “Humility,” on a little piece of paper, that I carry it with me during the advent season. It worked. It reminded me.

I invite you in this same activity. Here are some little note-paper. Write upon it your goal – one goal-for this advent. And try to keep it with you a least for the first week of Advent, in your pocket, in your wallet, in the back of your phone case. Some people are not patient when driving and sometime get angry

to other drivers. That's an example. But just write something that you will practice on for this advent and make the debriefing after Christmas.

..... 1 minute of pause....

Let's repeat together the verse three of today's psalms a prayer on the goal we just write and ask God to help us get rid of every leaves that can drive us away from God's path.

Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths. (Ps 25:3)

Amen.