

Second Sunday of Advent – A Chance at Repentance

*Delivered by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian
St. Sarkis Armenian Church. Carrollton, TX
December 4, 2016
Gospel Reading: Luke 13:1-9*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I went to a farmers market when I was in seminary and I purchased a banana pepper plant. There were five stalks, four of which already had fruit on them, while one did not. I tried everything to have the fifth stalk give fruit. I watered it, gave it plenty of light and even fixed the soil, but after three days, it produced nothing except fruit flies, so I eventually threw it out. This experience is very similar to today's Gospel reading, where Jesus tells a parable about a fig tree in a garden which does not give fruit.

Virtually all the Church Fathers agree that the fig tree represents the Jewish people and the lack of fruit is the Jewish people's lack of faith, but St. Ignatius (1st cen.) says that the fig tree represents each of us. This means that we are special and specifically planted, we are under God's watch and protection and we have someone who cares for us. That caretaker, according to the early Church Fathers, is none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

This is all done so that we bear spiritual fruit. St. Paul says that the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). In a word, the fruits of the Spirit are good works; actions.

In today's parable, the tree had all the signs of bearing fruit: luscious leaves, sturdy branches, and enough time (three years), but it had not shown any results, namely fruit. As a result, the owner wanted to cut it down because it was taking up space and nutrients, but the caretaker suggested to dig up the dirt around it, add manure and give it one more year. If by then it had not produced fruit, then it should be cut down – and the owner agreed. This shows us that God gives us second chances, but it also means that we must show results and bear fruit. We must not be fruitless in our faith.

Like the owner in the parable, God comes to us looking for fruits (Christian acts). He comes to us as a beggar, neighbor and stranger, searching for fruit, but He often finds Christians who, like the tree and Jewish nation, are without fruit. He finds Christians who put on a mask and pretend to have fruit, showing all the signs of faith, quoting Bible passages and offering knowledge and biblical advice, but never materializing their faith.

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Besides that fruits of the Spirit, which St. Paul mentions, there is one more fruit which is vital and God always searches for. That fruit is repentance. Just before the parable in today's Gospel reading, Christ warns His listeners that if they do not repent, they too will perish (Luke 13:5) [like those He mentioned (Luke 13:1-4)].

This is truly the hardest fruit to grow in our lives. It is difficult because we do not want to say "I'm sorry" or "I'm wrong" or "It's my fault". We are full of pride which prevents us. Yet, this is exactly what God wants from each of us and is the foundation upon which all of Christianity is built. These are the first words of St. John the Baptist at the news of Christ's coming (Mat. 3:2) and is echoed throughout all the prophets' words. Repentance is turning from our ways and returning to God, accepting that we are the sinful and He is the Righteous.

We have lost this in Christianity today, both in the East and in the West. Today we care more about looks, numbers and feelings and not the Truth. We don't want to move towards a new beginning, but stay and live in the past with grudges and resentment. We are called to repent and to forgive. This is what God looks for in every man's life and He gives us chances, every day we wake up, He gives us another chance to call up that relative whom we don't speak with or talk to that neighbor or co-worker and ask for forgiveness. He wants us to say, "You know, I don't know what happened in the past and why we don't speak anymore, but if I did something, forgive me."

This is the fruit of true repentance which God wants. And let us be warned, we have a chance now to produce that fruit, but if we ignore it and don't, then we will be cut down and perish, never being given another chance to bear fruit.

Amen.