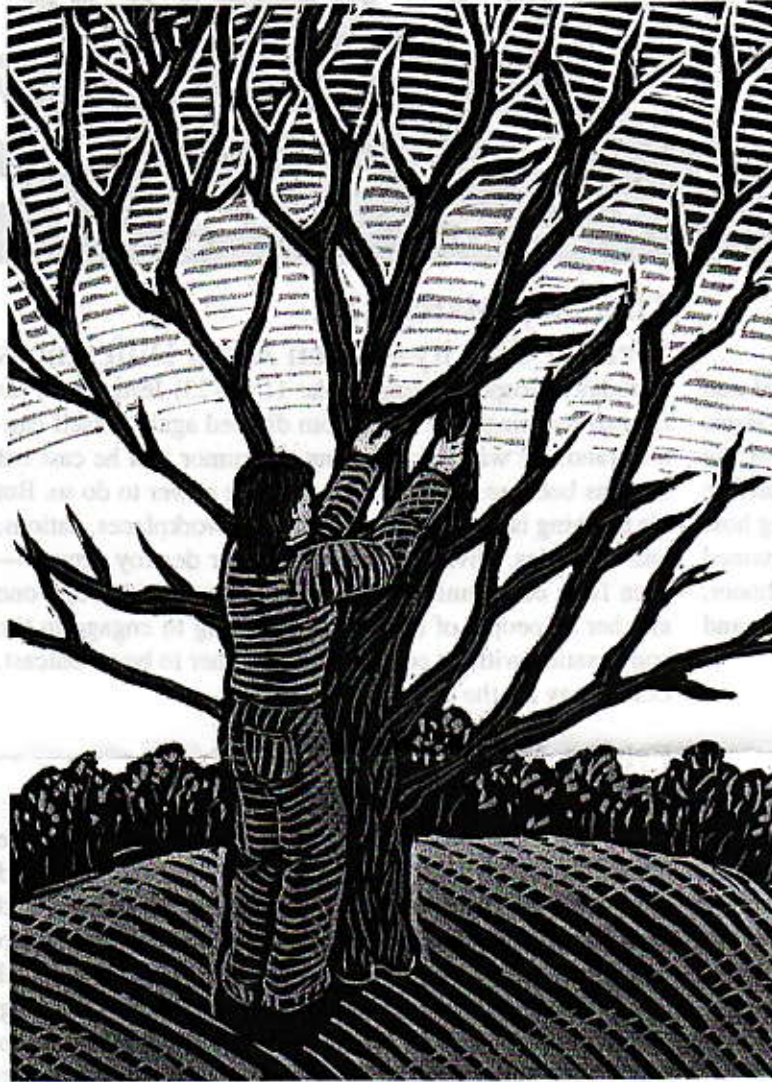


Third Sunday of Lent



Prayer for God's Care

Lord God,
at the beginning of creation, you planted
a garden of surpassing beauty and harmony.
Out of love, you created men and women
to live in unity with you,
with one another, and with all
your creatures.

Look on us now, for we need
your tender care.

Water us with your grace;
tend us with your love;
and in the midst of this Lenten journey,
carefully prune our branches,
that we might be free from all sin
that keeps us away from you.

Be for us a burning flame once again
to remind us that we are on holy ground
and that we long to see your face.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

March 7, 2010 Water, Feed, and Prune

Anyone who has planted a garden knows the expectation of beautiful flowers, abundant vegetables, and no weeds. It is easy, then, to imagine the disappointment of the man in Jesus' parable (Luke 13:1-9), whose fig tree did not yield fruit year after year. Just as he is ready to cut it down and start over, the gardener pleads for a little more time to work with the tree, sure that with proper feeding, the fruit will be plentiful. It is a parable about God's mercy and love for us.

An old Dutch hymn, "King Jesus Has a Garden," describes each flower in that particular garden as a different attribute—the violet is humanity, the rose is patience, the

marigold is obedience, and so on. The last verse of the hymn sings: "O Jesu joy, my heal and weal, my bliss complete. / Make thou my heart thy garden plot, fair trim and neat." As he did for the tree in the Gospel according to Luke, the gardener has his plans for us as well. He will prune, water, feed, and do what is necessary to help us thrive. But we must willingly, openly turn over the soil of our hearts to his grace. Perhaps this third week of Lent is a good time to think of ourselves as the garden of the Lord whose sole purpose is to yield fruit and beauty in abundance—a response to the wonderful love of God.

This Week at Home



Monday, March 8

Saint John of God

Saint John of God (1495–1550) was born in Portugal and received his name when he had a vision of the infant Jesus. Throughout his life he devoted himself to the care of the poor and the sick, often carrying them to his house where he could minister to their needs. He is known for rescuing hospital patients from a fire in which he, miraculously, remained unburned. He is the patron saint of hospitals. In his honor, visit someone in a hospital or nursing home this Lent, and pray with him or her for the grace of wholeness.

Tuesday, March 9

Saint Frances of Rome

The Italian saint Frances of Rome (1384–1440) recognized her vocation early. Although she expressed a desire to enter the convent, her parents married her to a good man who supported her in helping the poor. Through many hardships, even in the midst of war, Frances cared for the sick and the poor while also being faithful to her family. She is patron saint of automobile drivers because, according to legend, an angel lit the road for her when she traveled.

Wednesday, March 10

Fulfilling the Law

Many Christians think that Jesus replaced the Jewish law with something new. In today's reading (Matthew 5:17–19), Jesus sees his mission as a fulfillment of the law and the prophets. He knew that the law was a gift from God and was at the heart of our covenant relationship. He also knew that the law was not an end to itself, and he often argued with the scribes and Pharisees about this. Jesus distilled the law into two great commandments to love God and neighbor.

Thursday, March 11

Seeking Charity—Even Amid Differences

In today's Gospel reading (Luke 11:14–23) Jesus gives his famous teaching, that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. He was talking about the rumor that he cast out demons because the devil gave him the power to do so. But his teaching is also true about families, workplaces, nations, and countries. Divisions can weaken or destroy groups—even faith communities. We all need to acknowledge one another as people of faith and be willing to engage in the conversation without considering the other to be an outcast. Let us pray for the grace to do so.

Friday, March 12

Hosea Calls Us to Faithfulness

Hosea was a prophet who lived in the eighth century before Christ. In today's First Reading (Hosea 14:2–10) he called the people of Israel back to faithfulness when they had turned away from God. Hosea compared God's relationship with Israel to his own marriage. By worshipping idols, Israel was behaving like an unfaithful spouse. Today's reading says that God will lure Israel back into the wilderness to renew the relationship. Hosea also announced the promise of God to bring Israel to wholeness—a promise Christians see fulfilled in Jesus.

Saturday, March 13

Seeking Forgiveness with Humility

Luke often shows us Jesus' compassion for the outcast and his impatience with the hypocrite. Today's reading, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9–14), teaches the necessity of our humility before God and our need for forgiveness, no matter how righteous we think we are. We all need God's mercy. If you have not yet received the sacrament of Reconciliation this Lent, do so soon.

