

Homily **3rd Sunday in Lent - Year C** (24.3.19)

If it was me, I would have cut down the fig tree 'cause I can't stand figs.

[laughter]

But I was deeply moved by this text. This is one of the profound formative texts of the Jewish faith and I know we don't look at the Old Testament a lot. We see a load of very difficult, awkward stuff and wonder what the heck it's on about. But the essence of the Old Testament, the best bits, are profoundly needed to understand the gospel, and Jesus, and what we believe. But, the first thing that hit me, was I wondered if we were losing a sense of holiness, or if I was losing a sense of holiness. You see Moses approaches this mystery, as he hears the voice, say

**"Take off your shoes. This ground is holy,"** and he covers his face. And it should remind us when we come to this holy place, what we say, do, and behave like, and our gestures, our movement. I was picked up recently by a young child who said to me after I was bringing things on for the Mass, and he said to me,

**"You didn't bow to the altar. You just went past it."**  
He brought home to me that we can be easily so slipshod by familiarity.

But as I was saying, this text is so profound, because when God is asked His name and reveals,

**"I am who I am,"** the actual word in Hebrew are spelt YHWH. There's no vowels in Hebrew. They put dots or comas to show a sound. And you know to this day, how it's printed in Hebrew Bibles like that. If they're reading in the synagogue, no one will pronounce that word. It's considered too holy to be pronounced. So they'll substitute the phrase,  
**"The Lord God."**

And that's why we also never use that word normally in hymns, out of respect.

And it's fundamental, this, because this is God, the great I Am saying, I am pure being. You can't know my essence. And then Jesus comes along and suddenly makes powerful connections with this text when He declares in John's Gospel, five famous 'I Am's', putting Himself on the par with God.

- **"I am the bread of life."**

So He's saying, like that second reading said, that He was the manna that was given in the desert but He's more than that.

- **"I am the light of the world."**

It was God who created light. So He is saying He is on a par with God.

- **"I am the gate of the sheepfold."**

He's saying if we're here and God's there, He's the only person through whom we can access God.

- **"I am the good shepherd."**

The Old Testament's full of the good shepherd imagery, reserved mainly for God.

- **"And I am the resurrection and the life."**

In other words, He has the power over life and death.

These come alive when you realize the original bedrock of our faith in the Jewish scriptures,

**"I am who I am."**

But, you know, Jesus also says to us, and to other people,

**"You are."**

Jesus gives great compliments to the right people.

So He says,

**"You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church."**

That's profound. And so, every pope after that has been seen as the successor of Peter.

**"I am Peter."**

**"The chair of Peter."**

But there's two profound statements He makes about us that rightly belong as epithets of the Church. That really belong to the church.

**"You are the light of the world. A light should not be hidden under the bed but put on the lamp stand. You are the salt of the earth. If salt lose its taste, what use is it?"**

So Jesus gives us, as church, some 'I Am's', by saying,

**"You are."**

That we are meant to be a light in the world, reflecting the light of life, the light of the world, Jesus Himself. We're meant to be salt to the earth, bringing taste, and flavour to the meaning of life. But, you know, it struck me that if you just pondered in prayer one day, and made that personal,

**"I am a light in the world. I am salt to the earth,"**

what a good examination of conscience that would make for Lent.