

Good Morning Everyone,

My name is Brother Michael Koechner and I hope you read my bio from this past week's issue of Gleanings from the Wheat Field. I want to take this opportunity to thank Mother Becky for allowing me to check something off my bucket list: to give a sermon on a Sunday at Holy Eucharist. It is my hope that the words shared today will resonate with you.

This morning's sermon will be what appears on the surface three disparate topics but which I believe are intricately interwoven: the word yes, Lent, and gardening.

The word "yes" is affirmative, basically meaning that we agree to do something. There are various ways which "yes" can be said and here are some of varieties I have noticed:

1. The enthusiastic yes: Fist-pumping, excited "Yes" after swooshing the basketball through the net scoring a three pointer with 1 second left beating a dreaded opponent by 1 point.
2. The sad yes: Realizing that a beloved animal companion is dying and saying "yes" to the veterinarian to put the beloved companion to sleep.
3. The irritated yes: "Yes, I have my taxes done but I owe the IRS a few hundred bucks."
4. The surrender yes: "Yes, I realize that I need to lose weight, so I will forego the chocolate cake today."
5. The cautious yes: "Yes, I will do that Lord, but what will You expect of me?"

The books of the Bible are full of people, plain ol' folks like you and me, who said yes. My sense is that there are iterations of yes in various combinations and here are some examples of what I mean.

In today's Hebrew scripture reading from the Book of Exodus God is telling Moses he is to lead the people out of Egypt. Of course Moses is reluctant but does give a tacit yes when he asks God who should he say told Moses this. And let's face it, the harder Moses tries to get out of it God just pushes back until there is no longer an argument on Moses' part. Maybe a fearful and cautious yes from Moses.

Tomorrow the church celebrates the Feast of the Annunciation (only nine more months until Christmas folks!). The Angel Gabriel comes to Mary and informs her she is chosen to bring life to the Son of God. Can you imagine being a young teenage girl and hearing something like that? She does not go out screaming or hollering or fainting but according to the Gospel of Luke says: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be done with me according to your word." A surrendered yes, wouldn't you agree?

And in today's reading from Luke's Gospel regarding the fig tree, the vineyard owner basically gives and exasperated yes when the gardener wants to give the fig tree at least one more year to see if he could have it bear fruit.

This nation has been agrarian since its founding and this fact is not lost even today. People enjoy their gardens for they provide us with food, beauty, and exercise.

Once again referring to today's reading from the Book of Exodus, I wish to focus on the burning bush for a moment. The bush is not consumed by the flames! Many people have had a "burning bush" event in their life which provided them an AH HA moment. However, in my life I have been more of the smoldering shrub kind of guy, there is a small spark, but rather than the huge burning bush, it just smolders with the spark there until I am finally able to get it...

And let's go back to today's fig tree, the gardener asks for one more year as he said he would care for the tree, dig around it and fertilize it. I am sure that he would prune the tree as well because pruning brings about more luscious fruit and beautiful flowers than if the tree or plant were allowed to grow unattended.

Thirdly, this brings us to the topic of Lent. Our souls oft time lie fallow waiting to be pruned and fertilized for spiritual growth. Lent, then, is not so much a time of repentance, denial, and abstinence but a time of quiet, holy, introspective reflection. It is a time to prepare the soul for greater spiritual insights. It is a time to renew, repair, revitalize, rejoice, rekindle, and reassess areas in our life which may be askew. Far too many make the decision to be 'perfect' during Lent and then revert to the old way after Easter. If one wanted to look at this in an honest manner, Lent is to be lived every day of our lives rather than in some man-made time constraint.

Lent affords us the time to prepare for Christ's Resurrection through certain practices individually chosen to help us prepare for this wonderful celebration. Nurture and fertilize your soul with prayer and fasting, and I am not talking about fasting from food but from negativity, fear, and PAGGLES, you know pride, anger, greed, glutton, lust, envy, and sloth. Prepare your soul for planting the seeds of optimism, courage, humility, serenity, generosity, abstinence, love, kindness, and action on the physical, emotional and physical levels of life. And the most disappointing fact is, it will take more than 40 days and 40 nights for all of this to occur.

So, how are these three items linked together? No matter how we say "yes" to God, we will be taken at our word and slowly pruned and fertilized by the passage of time. When taking Holy Communion we say "yes" to God and possibly an understanding that Lent is actually a lifelong event and not a 40 day trial which then ceases. Each day will be a time for spiritual growth and understanding our faith more deeply.

The commitment to saying yes can have its challenges as well as its frustrations. Look at Mary after she said yes: Jesus was born in a barn; He was lost and found in the temple at age 12; she watched her Son get executed and then come to life again...and all because she said "yes." Should we expect an easier pass at life?

So, when we say "yes" at Lent and follow through with our chosen fast in an imperfectly human way, we are sanctified and prepared for a deeper understanding of ourselves and of God.

Are you willing to join me in saying "yes" so that we can see how Lent will fertilize, nurture, prune, and prepare us for the beauty God has bestowed upon each of us?

Amen.