

Homily for the 3rd Sunday in Lent

In the Middle Ages, theologians believed that if you placed a ladder against a wall you formed a triangle – the wall, the ladder and the floor. The triangle, as you well know, is a symbol for God – three sides/one reality. The medieval theologians believed that anyone who blundered through the center of the triangle was, in fact, intruding on sacred space. And anyone who would be so bold as to intrude on this “sacred space” would risk divine wrath!

Centuries later this foolish belief in the power of the triangle and in the divine wrath incurred for those who walked through it, was evidenced in England when it became the custom for those condemned to die by hanging were required to walk under the ladder that stood against the gallows. This action would incur the wrath of God and thus account for the bad luck of having to be hanged. This is the source of our belief that it is unlucky to walk underneath a ladder.

We live in the 21st Century and we know that this kind of belief is not only theologically unsound...it is downright silly. But tell me: how many people today would never walk underneath a ladder?

Somehow this misconceived belief in the power of the ladder reflects a subtle belief we have in God. Simply put, we believe that if we

do something wrong – the wrath of God will be on our doorstep. Or, putting it another way, if something bad happens then we've already done something wrong and we're just not aware of it.

The intent of the gospel is to let us know that we're wrong. God doesn't punish us for the things we do wrong. God doesn't keep a tally on our lives. That's the issue Jesus is speaking about. God is constantly giving us another chance. Like the tree in the gospel, God doesn't want us cut down for our failings. Rather God wants to give us another opportunity to grow and mature. God is eternally compassionate and forever loving.

In life we encounter tragedy and heartache, difficulties and disappointments. But these are not punishments from God. Rather these are the moments when God stands with us and is there helping us carry these burdens. God is as faithful to us as God was faithful to the people of Israel when He appeared to Moses in the bush that would not burn. And like the burning bush, God's love for us will never be extinguished.