

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT (YEAR C)

March 24, 2019

Exodus 3:1–8a, 13–15 • 1 Corinthians 10:1–6, 10–12 • Luke 13:1–9

I.

Sometimes I get an eye-roll or a laugh when I tell people how deep the “Terminator” series is.

I’m partial to the original movie (1984) and TV show, “The Sarah Connor Chronicles” that unfortunately only had two seasons.

By way of background,
the series is about humanity’s struggle against killer robots—terminators—that it has unwittingly created.

Beyond the action sequences and special effects,
the series probes the question of what it means to be human
(as opposed to a machine).

In that vein, the series deals with important themes and issues:
for example, our dependence on technology and the question of destiny.

There is a line in the movie that find eloquent and compelling.

The hero, John Connor, says,
“There is no fate but what we make of it ourselves.”

That thesis gets tested in the movie:
Are we capable of changing an outcome?

Despite humanity’s best efforts and the use of time travel,
the machines still take over: Judgment Day.

Yet humans keep fighting; they refused to be subdued by fate.

And along the way, as they battle machines,
they manage to retain their humanity,
helping and caring for others despite seemingly impossible odds.

I don't know the answer:

In the series,
is humanity simply incapable of preventing the rise of the machines?

In that sense, is fate the master?

Or, even with the rise of the machines,
is the point that humanity can always be human
regardless of its circumstances?

In that way, fate is not a master.

II.

"There is no fate but what we make of it ourselves."

I love that line because it underscores personal responsibility.

Yes, there are things that we don't control;
but there is much that we do control.

That includes, from a Christian perspective, our ultimate fate:
heaven or hell—being with God forever or being separated from him.

(By the way, remember that Purgatory is always temporary;
it is a process of purification that necessarily leads to heaven.)

Today's Gospel reminds us of the reality and possibility of hell.

Twice, Jesus declares:

“If you do not repent,
you will all perish as they did!”

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains hell like this:

“Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, ‘eternal fire.’ The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs” (no. 1035).

The Church also teaches very clearly that,

“God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end” (no. 1037).

In other words,

“There is no fate but what we make of it ourselves.”

Now, that shouldn't be understood in the sense that we can earn heaven; no, we can only receive the gift of heaven, and we can surely reject it.

The reality of hell is actually a consolation, because it means that we have choices—choices that give meaning to our lives.

Repentance, as Jesus urges in the Gospel, is one of those choices.

Let's remember that God doesn't just want us to eke our way through life.

No, God wants us to thrive;
he wants us to produce fruit for his kingdom,
to shape the world according to the Gospel:

“For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree
but have found none.”

Fear of hell is not enough to truly thrive as a Christian;
it's just the beginning, the minimum.

And we need to know what the minimum is.

The gardener—who I think is Christ—says to the owner:

“Sir, leave [the fig tree] for this year also,
and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it;
it may bear fruit in the future.
If not you can cut it down.”

I feel like the soil in which we are planted has become “exhausted”—
exhausted by the clerical abuse scandal.
But this is precisely the time in which our bearing fruit
is so important for the world.

It's not enough to just survive,
it's not enough to rail against the Church's institutional failures
and its dysfunction;
nor is it enough to bewail the corruption of society.

“There is no fate but what we make of it ourselves.”

We have a choice to make:
what kind of life do we want for ourselves and for our family?

What kind of society do we want to live in?

We answer that question by how we live each day.

So, an encouragement:
please receive the Sacrament of Penance this Lent.

Let's repent of our sins and draw closer to God.

And let's remember, in a particular way,
the Our Father, which encapsulates today's Gospel reading so well:

"Thy Kingdom come, they will be done...
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil."

God is at work—in the world, and in our lives.

And he wants us close to him,
so that we flourish as men and women.

That is what it means to be planted in God's soil,
to be rooted in holiness,
and to bear fruit for God's Kingdom.