



The Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke
Saint Theophylactus of Ochrid
1055-1107 A. D

13:6-9 He spake also this parable: A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the worker in his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why doth it uselessly occupy the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and put on dung to see whether it bear fruit. And if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

This parable follows in perfect sequence. Because the Lord had just said, *Except ye repent, ye shall perish*, He aptly adds this parable. The fig tree is the generation of the Jews producing no fruit but only bitter leaves. It stood in God's vineyard, that is, in the Judaic life under the law. The master of the house, Christ, came seeking from that three the fruit of faith and good deeds, and found none. Three times He came: the first through Moses, then through the prophets, and finally He came Himself. At last those who did not repent He cut away from the love of God, for they could no longer be called the nation of God, a holy people. In their place were put the Gentiles who were able to bring forth fruit. The fig tree may also mean all of human nature. The master of the house is God the Father: the worker in the vineyard is the Son of God, Who came among us to tend painstakingly the vineyard in which we are planted. Christ does not permit this fruitless fig tree to be cut down, but says, *"Let it alone this year also. Neither the law nor the prophets have improved these people, and they have not yielded any fruit of repentance. Yet I Myself will water them with My teachings and with My Passion, to see whether they will bear the fruit of obedience. And if not, then after that, Thou shalt cut it down, and remove these people from the portion of the righteous."* Three times has God sought from our nature the fruit of obedience, and it was not given: once, when we transgressed the commandment in paradise; again, they made a calf at the time of the lawgiving, *and they changed His glory into the likeness of a calf that*

*eateth grass;*¹ and the third time, when the Saviour and Lord was rejected by those who said, *We have no king but Caesar.*² It can also be said that each one of us is a fig tree planted in God's vineyard, that is, in the Church, or simply, in this world. God comes seeking fruit of each fig tree. If He finds you without fruit He commands that you be cut out from this life. But the worker in the vineyard makes an entreaty that you be spared. Who is this worker in the vineyard? It is either your guardian angel, or you yourself. For each man tends his own vine. "It often happens that when we become gravely ill or we are beset by some grievous danger, we say, 'Spare us, O Lord, this year also, and we shall repent.' *To dig about the tree and put on dung means to repent.* The soul, therefore, is dug around when compacted soil of earthly cares around it is dug up and loosened. And manure is put on it, signifying the warmth of that way of life which is held in dishonor and despised by all. For when a man rejects worldly glory and humbles himself ingloriously for the sake of the salvation of his soul, it is as if he has put dung on his soul so that it may bring forth fruit. If we bear fruit, well and good; but if not, the Lord no longer permits us to remain in His vineyard, but cuts us off from this world so that we do not uselessly occupy the ground. For when someone sees a sinner live for many years, he is harmed and becomes worse himself. Thus, not only is the sinner himself found to be fruitless, but he also hinders others from bearing fruit. But if he is cut off from this life, perhaps other sinners will see him cut off, and will come to their senses and repent and bear fruit. It is said that the master of the house comes to the fig tree *these three years*, signifying that the Lord comes to us through the three laws we have been given: the natural law, the Mosaic law and the spiritual law. We ought to have borne fruit after receiving the instruction of the natural law, for nature itself teaches us what we ought to do. But when God found that the natural law had been of no avail in us, He gave us the Mosaic law to assist the natural law. When this too was found to have been of no avail on account of our laziness, He gave us the spiritual law. Therefore, when these three laws have not corrected the soul of a man, nor has he benefited from a longer life or further forbearance, then he is allowed no more postponements. God is not deceived time and again by a plea for the extension of grace. But can you not also understand the *three years* to mean the three ages in a man's span of life? Childhood, which is considered to last until the age of eighteen; adulthood; and old age, when one begins to turn grey. When we do not bear fruit in old age, that is in

¹ Ps. 105:21

² Jn. 19:15

the third year, and yet we are permitted to live a little longer so that we may put on dung, that is, to undertake the life in Christ that is without honor in this world, if even then we prove false, the Lord will no longer spare us. He will cut us away so that we do not uselessly occupy the earth and harm others. This explanation seems to me to fit more closely the purpose of the text.

The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke by Blessed Theophylact Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria
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Bless! Now we see, above, in the life of an Orthodox Saint, Theophylact (The God-Kept and God-Guarded One), Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria, Chosen as the Missionary to the Slavic People, the recognition that, as Saint Peter declares it, we are a peculiar people, peculiar in that, in order to keep the hope of our union with our Christ unclouded in this rough-and-tumble life, we separate ourselves from the world and the world from ourselves by a way of life that Saint Theophylact describes as dung. "To dig about the tree and put on dung means to repent," he writes. The manure we use signifies "the warmth of that way of life which is held in dishonor and despised by all. For when a man rejects worldly glory and humbles himself ingloriously for the sake of the salvation of his soul, it is as if he had put dung on his soul so that it may bring forth fruit." The fruit we wish to produce and to protect is, as Saint Symeon the New Theologian writes, the granting to us by God of the "kingdom of heaven within us (Luke 17:21) in order that we should not merely be fed by the hope of entering it, but, entering into full possession thereof should cry, our 'life is hid with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3)." (Practical and Theological Precepts as quoted in the Philokalia.)

So we have undertaken this Great Fast, not that we have ever made any gains at all in the life in Christ, but that, having fallen, we might pick ourselves up, as Saint Theophylact writes a few lines later on, "and put on dung, that is, to undertake the life in Christ that is without honor in this world," putting all our hope in our rising with Him in the uncreated radiance of Holy Pascha.

Begging your forgiveness and prayers,
unworthy hieromonk Theodore & mga.

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