**3rd SUNDAY OF LENT [3rd March, 2013]**

READINGS: Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15/ 1 Cor. 10:1-6, 10-12/ Luke 15:1-9

THEME: REMOVE THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

As Moses got closer to the spectacle of the bush on fire, yet unconsumed, he heard the words: ‘Come no nearer! **Remove the sandals from your feet**, for the place where you stand is **holy** ground’ (Ex. 3:5). This injunction would later become for the Israelites the norm for entering the temple (the holy place of worship). Sandals collected dust or dirt, and with the understanding that ‘cleanliness is next to godliness’, the Israelites removed their footwear before entering the holy place of worship.

Beloved, in this season of Lent the Lord is asking us also to remove our sandals so as to enter His divine presence. However, since we are entering not a physical but a spiritual place (God’s presence), we are to remove not our physical sandals but our spiritual sandals, which has collected not physical dirt but the spiritual dirt of sins.

What then are our spiritual sandals? Like the physical kind, the spiritual sandals are not part of human nature (that is, we were born with them). Rather they are ‘things’ we make and use (we can ‘wear’ or ‘remove’ them). Spiritual sandals are, therefore, ‘things’ by which we are led to into temptation and sins (spiritual dirt).

Beloved, today, I want to call our attention to one type of spiritual sandals: the ‘occasion of sin’. The ‘occasion of sin’ is a place, an environment, event or encounter in which we are liable to fall into temptation and sin. For instance, if I know that a particular place of entertainment can lead me into sin, then it has become for me an ‘occasion of sin’. Or, if I know that a friendship (especially from a previous encounter) can lead me into sin (e.g. against the sixth commandment), then being with or visiting my friend could be an ‘occasion of sin’.

Several times in today’s gospel reading, Jesus Christ calls us to repent (reform). Repentance entails the strong resolve to remove our spiritual sandals (occasion of sin). Jesus Christ says God’s mercy is great, but now (and not later) is the time to repent! In the parable of the fig tree which was given an extra year to yield fruit or else be cut down, the message of Jesus is that **though God’s mercy is unlimited, our time on earth (to repent) is limited**; so now is the time to remove our spiritual sandals together with the sins they have collected.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, as we remember every Holy Thursday, washed the feet of His disciples (Jn. 13), but they first had to remove their sandals and offer their feet for washing. Beloved, as we prepare for the Holy Week, let us remove our spiritual sandals of the occasions of sins and offer our ‘spiritual feet’ (hearts) for cleansing, not by water, but by the precious blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen!