

“He came seeking fruit on it and found none.”

Lk 13:6

St Paul tells us in today’s Second Reading that ‘our fathers were all under the cloud.’ He is referring to the protective presence of God who hovered above His people and guided them as they left their state of slavery in Egypt and made their way across the Red Sea, through the desert, and into the Promised Land. This idea of God’s presence as a cloud is used several times in the Old Testament, for example when God descended upon Mt Sinai to seal the covenant with Moses and the People of Israel (Ex 19:16-18), and again when God came down to dwell in the tabernacle, built by Moses, which housed the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 40:34-35). The cloud described in today’s reading *encompasses* the people in God’s realm, in His domain, and becomes a whole world in which they ‘live and move and have their being,’ as St Paul goes on to describe it in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 17:28).

In an age when we are bombarded by news about the wider world, when we can barely escape the barrage of information from the world in which we live – through the news media, through social media, through websites and blogs and apps – we might be forgiven for thinking (were we to think about it at all) that we are shaped by this continual onslaught of the latest stories from our personal network of contacts or from across the globe more generally. And, indeed, the truth is that we *are* shaped by all that permeates our minds from the outside world. We cannot avoid being influenced by what we choose to see, or to listen to, or to engage with. Advertizing companies know this perfectly well, and although many of us might claim not to be influenced by adverts, those multi-national companies would not spend such vast amounts of money on developing their campaigns and their algorithms were this not so.

But here's the thing. Just as we can choose what we put into our bodies – opting for healthy or unhealthy diets as the case may be – so we have a great deal of choice about what enters our minds. We can *choose* what programmes, or music, or websites, or adverts, or pop-ups to click on. Indeed, we can choose whether we click on any of them at all! We can choose what music to listen to. We can choose what we read. We can choose what conversations we have. And we can choose the company we keep, be that online or face to face

There are many people who would influence our thinking if they could, but we can choose to whom we listen, and we can choose who and what is allowed into our personal space, into our personal cloud.

Just as God drew Moses to Himself through His presence in the Burning Bush, and just as God drew His people towards the Promised Land through the cloud that guided them by day and by night across the desert, so we can allow God to draw us onwards and into His company, into His presence, if we will. We really *can* choose to shut out at least some of the clamour of this world by turning our attention to God and the things of God instead. We can *choose* to turn off the computer; we can *choose* to use our devices strictly for work or for absolutely necessary tasks only. We can choose instead to pray; we can choose to take up some spiritual reading; and whether it is during Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament here on Saturdays during Lent or in some other way and in some other place, we can *choose* to spend time in God's company. We can *choose* to enter the cloud of God's presence and, if we want to, we can choose *Him* to be our chief Influencer.

In today's Gospel passage we see two seemingly unconnected events: first, the news of the tower of Siloam that collapsed, but Christ warned that whilst these people who died were not necessarily greater sinners than the rest of us nonetheless we will all perish if we do not take note of Our Lord's exhortation. And second, we hear of the barren fig tree that

is threatened with being cut down if it does not start bearing fruit soon. But these two items *are* connected. We all live in a world where bad things happen. We live in a damaged and fallen world, and whilst any one of us may be a greater or lesser sinner, even so none of us can escape the consequences of the sins of a fallen race. *But* we can still choose to bear fruit or not, as we will. We are free to choose whether to draw on the nourishment that God makes available to us and to flourish, and to live a life of supernatural health and spiritual goodness, or we can choose to live in the stale and sterile world of the internet, of global news and events, of apps and blogs, and websites, and the like.

Day by day, and hour by hour, we can choose which cloud we allow ourselves to be drawn into: the iCloud or God's cloud.

Holy is God. Holy and strong. Holy immortal One. Have mercy on us.