

Scripture Study

Third Sunday of Lent – Cycle C



Opening prayer

Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15

(Ps 103:1-4,6-8,11)

1 Corinthians 10:1-6,10-12

Luke 13:1-9

Overview of the Gospel:

- In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus has just finished a long discourse on the need to be prepared for his Coming (Luke 12). He then uses two incidents from the current events of his day—the slaughter of a group of Galileans by Pontius Pilate, and the deadly collapse of a tower, killing 18 bystanders—to emphasize the urgency of repentance.
- Though neither event is recorded outside the Scriptures, the first tragedy, according to the Jewish historian Josephus, would not be out of character for the Roman governor of Judea Pontius Pilate as he was known to have committed similar atrocities. As for the Tower of Siloam, the ruins can be seen in Jerusalem to this day. In Jesus' time it was common belief that most misfortune experienced by people was punishment for sin (Job 31:3; Proverbs 10:24, John 9:24-34), a view Jesus did not share (John 9:1-3).
- What Jesus wishes to emphasize is that just like the owner of the fig tree in the parable, God out of his great mercy (Ezekiel 33:11; Romans 2:14; 2 Peter 3:1-16), gives us ample—although not unlimited—time to, as John the Baptist says in Matthew 3:8, “bear fruit that befits *repentance*” (in New Testament Greek, *metanoeo*—literally, to change one's mind for the better).

Questions:

- In the First Reading, God reveals very clearly to Moses who he is and how it is his people can come to know him. How do you keep before you the identity of God and his holiness, and your need of repentance before him? How can you do this better?
- In verses 6-9, whom does the fig tree represent? The owner? The gardener?
- How do the incidents of Pilate's bloodshed (verse 1) and the collapsing tower of Siloam (verse 4) provide examples of the urgency of repentance?
- What is the danger of associating someone's misfortune with sin (verses 2, 4)?
- How do you treat newspaper accounts of tragic deaths? How often do they remind you of your mortality and of your own need of repentance? If they have not, how should you take advantage of Jesus' admonition (verses 3, 5)?
- If you had one more year like the fig tree to turn your life around, what would you do? What fruit do you want to be producing by this time next year?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1427--1439

Closing prayer

Your duty is to sanctify yourself. Yes, even you. Who thinks that this task is only for priests and religious? To everyone, without exception, our Lord said: 'Be ye perfect, as My Heavenly Father is Perfect.' --St. Josemaria Escriva

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass Scripture readings!

"If it does not bear fruit, you can cut it down"

Gospel Reading: *Luke 13:1-9*

Meditation: What can a calamity, such as a political blood-bath or a natural disaster, teach us about God's kingdom and the consequences of bad choices and sinful actions? When calamity and disaster hit the Jewish people, such as their 400 year enslavement in the land of Egypt, they often saw it as the consequence of their unrepentant sin and persistent unfaithfulness to God. God, however in his mercy, promised to deliver the Israelites when he sent his servant Moses to lead his people to freedom.

Jesus was asked by some listeners to address the issue of sin and its consequences in the light of two current disasters that befell the residents of Jerusalem. The first incident occurred in the temple at Jerusalem. Pilate, who was the Roman governor of Jerusalem at the time, ordered his troops to slaughter a group of Galileans who had come up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice in the temple. We do not know what these Galileans did to incite Pilate's wrath, nor why Pilate chose to attack them in the holiest of places for the Jews, in their temple at Jerusalem. For the Jews, this was political barbarity and sacrilege at its worst! The second incident which Jesus addressed was a natural disaster, a tower in Jerusalem which unexpectedly collapsed, killing 18 people. The Jews often associated such calamities and disasters as a consequence of sin. Scripture does warn that sin can result in calamity! *Though the righteous fall seven times, and rise again, the wicked are overthrown by calamity* (Proverbs 24:16).

The real danger and calamity which Jesus points out is that an unexpected disaster or a sudden death does not give us time to repent of our sins and to prepare ourselves to meet the Judge of heaven and earth. The Book of Job reminds us that misfortune and calamity can



befall both the righteous and the unrighteous alike. Jesus gives a clear warning - take responsibility for your actions and moral choices and put sin to death today before it can destroy your heart, mind, soul, and body as well. Unrepentant sin is like a cancer which corrupts us from within. If it is not eliminated through repentance - asking God for forgiveness and for his healing grace, it leads to a spiritual death which is far worse than physical destruction.

Jesus' parable of the barren fig trees illustrated his warning about the consequences of allowing sin and corruption to take root in our hearts and minds. Fig trees were a common and important source of food for the people of Palestine. A fig tree normally matured within three years, producing plentiful fruit. If it failed, it was cut down to make room for more healthy trees. A decaying fig tree and its bad fruit came to symbolize for the Jews the consequence of spiritual corruption caused by evil deeds and unrepentant sin. The unfruitful fig tree symbolized the outcome of Israel's unresponsiveness to the word of God. The prophets depicted the desolation and calamity of Israel, due to her unfaithfulness to God, as a languishing fig tree (see Joel 1:7,12; Habakuk 3:17; and Jeremiah 8:13). Jeremiah likened good and evil rulers and members of Israel

with figs that were good for eating and figs that were rotten and useless (Jeremiah 24:2-8). Jesus' parable depicts the patience of God, but it also contains a warning that we should not presume upon patience and mercy. God's judgment will come – sooner or later – in due course.

Why does God judge his people? He judges to purify and cleanse us of all sin that we might grow in his holiness and righteousness. And he disciplines us for our own good, to inspire a godly fear and reverence for him and his word. God is patient, but for those who persistently and stubbornly rebel against him and refuse to repent, there is the consequence that they will lose their soul to hell. Are God's judgments unjust or unloving? *When God's judgments are revealed in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness* (Isaiah 26:9). To pronounce God's judgment on sin is much less harsh than what will happen if those who sin are not warned to repent.

God, in his mercy, gives us time to get right with him, but that time is now. We must not assume that there is no hurry. A sudden and unexpected death leaves one no time to prepare to settle one's accounts when he or she must stand before the Lord on the Day of Judgment. Jesus warns us that we must be ready at all times. Tolerating sinful habits and excusing unrepentant sin will result in bad fruit and eventual destruction. The Lord in his mercy gives us both grace and time to turn away from sin, but that time is right now. If we delay, even for a day, we may discover that grace has passed us by and our time is up. Do you hunger for the Lord's righteousness and holiness?

"Lord Jesus, increase my hunger for you that I may grow in righteousness and holiness. May I not squander the grace of the present moment to say "yes" to you and to your will."

