

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matt 4:17

Repent, says the Lord;
the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Gospel Luke 13:1-9; L30C

Some people told Jesus about the
Galileans

whose blood Pilate had mingled
with the blood of their
sacrifices.

Jesus said to them in reply,

“Do you think that because
these Galileans suffered in
this way

they were greater sinners than
all other Galileans?

By no means!

But I tell you, if you do not
repent,

you will all perish as they did!

Or those eighteen people who were killed
when the tower at Siloam fell on
them—

do you think they were more guilty
than everyone else who lived in
Jerusalem?

By no means!

But I tell you, if you do not repent,
you will all perish as they did!”

And he told them this parable:

“There once was a person who had a fig
tree planted in his orchard,
and when he came in search of fruit on
it but found none,

he said to the gardener,

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

So cut it down.

Why should it exhaust the soil?’

He said to him in reply,

‘Sir, leave it 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.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

Human beings have an innate drive to find causation, a reason for things and events happening. This generally works well and helps us devise systems and ways of doing things that are safer and more productive. For example, automobile accident rates have been going down for years, measured by deaths per million miles driven. We design cars and trucks to be safer, based on research and testing. Though there might be an accident, it is far more

likely that a human being will survive due to better engineering, design, etc. And yet, when an accident happens we still look for reasons, for example, excessive speed of the vehicle, or perhaps the driver was impaired by alcohol, lack of sleep, or something else. We seek to explain reasons for events, especially accidents.

In the ancient world, and perhaps even our own, many accidents or tragic events were explained by appeal to the gods, or God. It was understood that bad things happened to bad people; in other words, if something bad happened to someone, it's because that someone did something bad. Good people lived lives that were blessed and filled with good things. A tragedy or accident nearly guaranteed

that the victim was somehow at fault, had reaped the tragic remuneration for what he had sown. Much of the Old Testament, especially the Torah, provides the underpinnings for this view. But there are other books, for example, Job, that question it.

At the time of Jesus, when a tragic event happened at Siloam or when Pilate desecrated Jewish blood, the popular idea was that these people somehow had it coming. They must have done something bad for which they were punished. Jesus, however, interprets these events differently. He does not see this as a just punishment for some hidden sin. Instead, he tells those who are self-righteous in their smugness that the same will happen to them unless they repent. The period of time they have between witnessing the tragedy that befell others and the unknown time of their own death is a time for repentance. And the parable Jesus gives them underlines this point. The parable also subtly informs the audience that they have not been producing the fruit of good works. They have been given a limited amount of time to repent, but if that doesn't happen they, too, will be cut down like the barren fig tree, like those who suffered the tragedy at Siloam or desecration at the hands of Pilate. The message of today's gospel can be summarized in one simple word: Repent!

Living the Paschal Mystery

A tragic and untimely death has a way of focusing our attention. Unfortunately, when we lose someone dear suddenly we become painfully aware of how short our life is, how precious are the days that we have been given. Too often our lives are occupied with simple tasks rather than profound meaning. There are daily chores to do, people who rely on us to do our part. But today's gospel reminds us that the time we are given is short and may come to a conclusion quickly and without warning. The time we have on this earth is for repentance and subsequently for doing the will of God. When we see tragedy strike others it can be easy for some to explain away the circumstances to poor decision making on their part, or plain bad luck. We might even become a bit proud



Year A readings may be used, see Appendix A, pp. 276-77.

at our own more fortunate and prudent decision making, not recognizing the many close calls we have certainly faced. But the time we are given is not for smugness or pride. Tragedy can befall any of us without warning. The gospel is a call for us to appreciate the limited time we have on earth, to respond generously to the needs of others, and to walk humbly.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: if you do not repent, / you will all perish

To the point: When Jesus tells the crowds that they must repent lest they perish, he is speaking of a spiritual death rather than a physical one. After all, the first part of the gospel is denying the all-too-human belief that bad things only happen to bad people. Instead, we are called to focus on the fruitfulness of our own fig trees. Have we been cultivating and fertilizing the soil of our lives so that we might bear good fruit in the kingdom of God?

Connecting the Gospel

to the second reading: A tone of warning continues in the second reading from St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. Paul warns the community at Corinth against the scourge of overconfidence: “[W]hoever thinks he is standing secure / should take care not to fall.” In the gospel reading we are not told whom Jesus is talking to. But we can assume that whatever the demographics of this particular crowd, Jesus is intent upon warning them against complacency and self-righteousness. The parable of the barren fig tree invited them—as it invites us today—to consider whether we are bearing good fruit or merely exhausting the soil.

to experience: Each year during the season of Lent we heed the gospel call to repent. This season helps to protect against the overconfidence that St. Paul warns of. Instead of spending our spiritual lives in a self-satisfied bubble, we are called to place them under a microscope and to see where we are in need of God’s grace and forgiveness.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: While the gospel and the second reading call us to repentance, the psalm reminds us of the response we can expect from God. The psalmist assures us that we have a God who “pardons all [our] iniquities, / heals all [our] ills.” His compassion and mercy are infinite and unfathomable for “[a]s far as the east is from the west, / so far has he removed our sins from us” (NABRE). We can depend on the mercy of God because we have witnessed it throughout history. The psalmist reminds us, “He has made known his ways to Moses, / and his deeds to the children of Israel.” In the first reading, God speaks to Moses from the burning bush and tells him, “I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt / and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, / so I know well what they are suffering.” Our God is a God of empathy. Just as God entered into the suffering of the Israelites in bondage in Egypt, he enters into the bondage and suffering we experience when our lives are touched by sin. The psalmist’s message reminds us to heed the warnings of Jesus and St. Paul with complete trust in God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness.

to psalmist preparation: In the readings for this Third Sunday of Lent it is your role to proclaim the good news of God’s never-ending mercy and compassion. How have you experienced this mercy in your own life?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

God calls Moses by name and Moses answers, “Here I am.” How have you experienced God’s call in your own life? What has been your response?

God identifies himself to Moses as the “the God of your ancestors” (NABRE). We know God throughout history and also within our own lives of faith. How does your family and/or community pass on faith to younger generations?

St. Paul admonishes us, “Do not grumble.” What situations in your life are met with grumbling? How might you greet them a different way?

Jesus gives us the parable of the barren fig tree. Where in your life, family, or parish is there a lack of fruit being borne? How might you cultivate the ground to encourage fruitfulness?