



Third Sunday of Lent-C

Lk 13:1-9

Dear Friends,

The first two weeks of Lent each year feature the story of the temptations of Jesus and his Transfiguration. This year, with the Gospel of Luke, the theme for the next three Sundays of Lent is repentance.

Today's gospel selection has a story of two tragedies and a parable. The two disasters, one caused on purpose and the other by accident, are explained by Jesus as a call to repent. Jesus is clear. Any interpretation of the events as punishment from God is totally off the mark. All people are liable to injustice and the foibles of both nature and human mistakes. In fact, it seems that the good are more prone to this fate of unearned suffering.

Jesus is using the events, along with the fig tree parable, to invite people to take stock of their lives. The issue is this: are we ready to meet God? It is an unambiguous call to repentance, a time to examine the state of our life in the light of God's call.

Knowing something about the fig tree helps to better understand the message. Fertile soil was in very limited supply in Jesus time. This fig tree was wasting a precious commodity since the normal fig tree was especially fruitful. Most of the time, it produced a second abundant yield for the year.

In the story of the two disasters, Jesus was encountering a trap, similar to the tax for Cesar question. If he chose one side he was for the Roman oppressor and against the people. In the alternative, he was shown to be against Rome and liable to their wrath. As usual, he turned it around. He raised the issue of repentance. If they were not ready to meet God, they would suffer a fate ultimately more tragic than the victims in the two dreadful incidents.

As always, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus is most helpful in understanding the message of today's gospel. His life is a clear message that bad things happen to good people. Yet he shows us that life goes on and love prevails over all in the end. Likewise, it helps to see Jesus as the gardener in the parable. He both is a person of compassion and the promise of the God of "the second chance."

The Lenten season is a time for us to take stock of our life. We need to again embrace our merciful God. It is a time to accept our sinful condition and plunge into the sea of God's cleansing mercy that awaits us. We are called to produce the fruit of a good life. The best place to start is to recognize both our sinfulness and God's mercy.

Today's gospel is quite clear. Now is the time to act. We have no guarantee for tomorrow! The fig tree is a sign to us that we may well be in our final year to bear fruit.