

LIVING THE GOSPEL
THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT
Mar 7, 2010



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Theme: "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Gathering Prayer

All: God of all compassion, Father of all goodness, to heal the wounds our sins and selfishness bring upon us you bid us turn to fasting, prayer, and sharing with our brothers. We acknowledge our sinfulness, our guilt is ever before us: when our weakness causes discouragement, let your compassion fill us with hope and lead us through a Lent of repentance to the beauty of Easter joy. Grant this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Luke 13:1-9

¹ There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? ³ I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

⁶ And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷ And he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?' ⁸ And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. ⁹ And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Saturday 10am - 12pm at Church of The Holy Cross (room #03-06)

Contacts:

George Chee georgejc@gmail.com
Anthony Lim am32lim@singnet.com.sg
Ellic Hiu fdjseno@pacific.net.sg

The Navarre Bible – Commentaries;
Living Liturgy – Liturgical Ministry, The Liturgical Press;
Emmaus Journey – www.emmausjourney.org

Gospel Notes

1-5. Our Lord used current events in his teaching. The Galileans referred to here may be the same as mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (5:37). The episode was fairly typical of the times Jesus lived in, with Pilate sternly suppressing any sign of civil unrest. We do not know anything about the accident at Siloam other than what the Gospel tells us.

The fact that these people died in this way does not mean that they were worse than others, for God does not always punish sinners in this life (cf. Jn 9:3). All of us are sinners, meriting a much worse punishment than temporal misfortune: we merit eternal punishment; but Christ has come to atone for our sins, he has opened the gates of heaven. We must repent of our sins; otherwise God will not free us from the punishment we deserve. "When you meet with suffering, the Cross, your thought should be: what is this compared with what I deserve?" (Bl. J. Escriva, *The Way*, 690).

3. "He tells us that, without Holy Baptism, no one will enter the Kingdom of heaven (cf. Jn 3:5); and, elsewhere, that if we do not repent we will all perish (Lk 13:3). This is all easily understood. Ever since man sinned, all his senses rebel against reason; therefore, if we want the flesh to be controlled by the spirit and by reason, it must be mortified; if we do not want the body to be at war with the soul, it and all our senses need to be chastened; if we desire to go to God, the soul with all its faculties needs to be mortified" (St John Mary Vianney, *Selected Sermons*, Ash Wednesday).

6-9. Our Lord stresses that we need to produce plenty of fruit (cf. Lk 8:11-15) in keeping with the graces we have received (cf. Lk 12:48). But he also tells us that God waits patiently for this fruit to appear; he does not want the death of the sinner; he wants him to be converted and to live (Ezek 33:11) and, as St Peter teaches, he is "forbearing towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). But God's clemency should not lead us to neglect our duties and become lazy and comfort-seeking, living sterile lives. He is merciful, but he is also just and he will punish failure to respond to his grace.

"There is one case that we should be especially sorry about—that of Christians who could do more and don't; Christians who could live all the consequences of their vocation as children of God, but refuse to do so through lack of generosity. We are partly to blame, for the grace of faith has not been given us to hide but to share with others (cf. Mt 5:15). We cannot forget that the happiness of these people, in this life and in the next, is at stake. The Christian life is a divine wonder with immediate promises of

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Sharing and Discussion

1. Why do people feel that another's misfortune is the result of personal sinfulness?
2. What are the conditions that bring a person to repentance?
3. What needs to take place in your life, or the life of your community to enhance fruitfulness?

Closing Prayer

All: O God, you are the giver of all good things. Help us to repent, bear fruit, and one day enjoy everlasting life with you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen

satisfaction and serenity—but on condition that we know how to recognize the gift of God (cf. Jn 4:10) and be generous, not counting the cost" (Bl. J. Escriv a, *Christ is passing by*, 147).

Gospel Reflection

The first part of this Sunday's gospel leaves a lot of room for us to fill in the blanks! We don't know anything about the two tragic events reported in the gospel. Jesus doesn't reply to the people by filling in more information; rather, he uses these probably fairly recent events that are very much on the minds of people as a "teachable moment."

These events involve tragic death, and Jesus uses these tragedies to make absolute that unless we repent, we also will die. Then in the parable of the fig tree, Jesus reveals the patience of God with us, despite our slowness to repent. How merciful is our God (see psalm)! This is God's work of mercy: to take what is almost dead and coax it to new life. This is our work of repentance: to turn from sinfulness toward God's transforming mercy.

Jesus redirects the people from idle speculation about the meaning of the tragic fate of others to the serious work of their own repentance. As the second reading reminds us, "standing secure" in the graciousness of the new life God offers us does not mean that, because God gives us everything needed for our journey toward salvation, we don't need to cooperate with God to "cultivate" and "fertilize" our spiritual lives. We "grumble" our way through life—we judge others, fail to live up to our baptismal commitments, do not heed all the warnings given us. Jesus is quite clear in his message: "bear fruit" or be "cut . . . down." Our encouragement is that God is ever patient, ever merciful. God never gives up on us.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Suffering for suffering's sake is not what transforms us so that we can bear fruit—the dying that leads to new life is how we bear fruit. The dying that repentance requires forestalls meaningless dying; the dying we do in order to bear fruit is the result of cultivating an attitude of openness to constant transformation; the "fertilizer" is the charity, fasting, and prayer of our Christian penance.

Repentance is changing one's mind, letting go of the narrowness of our

own perception of how life should be and embracing the expansiveness of God's plan for salvation. Repentance, in terms of changing one's mind, is really the same as conversion. The dying to self of repentance and coming to new life through God's gracious mercy characterize our Christian living, and make real and concrete our baptismal commitment. If we wish to bear fruit we must die to ourselves. Here is an interesting paradox: if we don't bear fruit, we die, but we must die to bear fruit. The choice before us is about dying: meaningless dying (selfishness) or fruitful dying (to self for the sake of others).

The gospel parable says for "three years" the owner of the fig tree had been waiting for good fruit. God waits more than three years for us to bear fruit— God waits each and every day of our lives for us to bear fruit. The good news is that God never gives up on us. God continually cultivates and fertilizes— especially by the ongoing proclamation of God's word and the invitation to God's table. All we need do is respond by dying to self. God does bring forth new life in us.

Old and New Testament links

First Reading — Exodus 3:1-8,13-15

¹ Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ⁷ Then the LORD said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ...

¹³ Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 103:1-4,6-8,11

¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! ² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, ³ who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, ...

⁶ The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. ⁸ The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ... ¹¹ For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 10:1-6,10-12

¹ I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same supernatural food ⁴ and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. ¹⁰ ...nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.