

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT; Cycle – C; March 23rd 2025
Exodus 3:1-8; 1Corinthians 10: 1-6, 10-12; Luke 13:1-9

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

The scribes and Pharisees considered the deadly diseases and disasters as God's punishment against sinners. Keeping this concept in mind, some people approached Jesus with the two contemporary mishaps which happened in the area. In the first incident, Pilate executed a few revolutionaries who rebelled against Roman rule. In the second case a tower in Siloam fell and 18 people were killed in that mishap. The people already passed the judgment that these victims were more sinful than others. They approached Jesus only to get his confirmation for their verdict.

Perhaps the reply of Jesus surprised the crowd. In his answer, instead of condemning the victims, Jesus tries to bring out three great truths. *First of all, when a disaster falls on some people, in any form, we should not conclude that they suffered due to their grave sins. Secondly, as all human beings are sinners, they need to repent to receive forgiveness from God.* If they don't repent, their fate will be worse than those who die in a mishap. For, the victim of a disaster loses only the physical life on earth; **whereas an unrepentant sinner loses his/her eternal life.** *Thirdly, through the parable of the gardener and the fruitless fig tree Jesus proves that God is always merciful and patient towards a sinner and He waits for his/her conversion.* It is not the desire of God that a sinner should perish with the sin. In the Book of Ezekiel chapter 33:11 God says, **“As I live, I swear I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but rather in the wicked man's conversion, that he may live. Turn, turn from your evil ways!”**

We always find a compassionate and forgiving God in the Old Testament. The Books of Prophets and the Psalms speak loudly about the same. When we come to the New Testament we find the same compassion and forgiveness of God embodied in Jesus. *Jesus never condemned a sinner; rather encouraged his/her return and conversion.* He was even accused of being the friend of tax collectors and sinners. Besides today's parable of the fruitless fig tree, we have the parable of the lost son in Luke 15 which is the clear evidence of God's forgiving attitude towards repentant sinners.

In Matthew's gospel Jesus expresses the purpose of his Incarnation: **“I did not come to call the righteous but sinners” (Mt. 9:13b).** From the parable of the lost son or the prodigal son, one thing is very clear that God expects a simple condition from the sinner that he/she should show the sign of repentance. John the Baptist started his ministry with the invitation: **“Produce good fruit as evidence of repentance” (Mt 3:8).** So John makes it very clear that leading a fruitful life is the result of repentance. He also

warns the unrepentant sinners: **“Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into fire” (Mt 3:10b)**. Jesus never delivered a fiery discourse as John the Baptist did; rather he started with a simple demand: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 17)**. The theme of repentance is seen repeatedly in the preaching of Jesus. In today’s gospel Jesus says twice: **“But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!”**

Strictly defining, repentance is the activity of reviewing one’s actions and feeling contrition for the wrong done. It demands a personal commitment to change one’s life. In the Biblical context repentance is the sign of radical change of life (*metanoia*) and there we go for a new life. **It is not enough that we just feel sorry for the sins we have committed and then repeat the same sins. Once we repent, it should bring about changes in our life.** To the prostitute woman who was repentant of her past life, Jesus said, *‘Go and sin no more.’*

If we wish to have forgiveness of sin, the only thing what we need to do is to repent and make amendments in our life. **Where there is no true repentance, there is no forgiveness; where there is no forgiveness granted no eternal life is possible.** Unfortunately, our modern society belittle the mortal sins with the chocolate covering, *‘so and so made a poor choice;’* that is all. But Jesus is very clear in his saying, **“If you don’t repent you will perish.”** As we have heard in the parable of the fig tree, Jesus is pleading with God for us to extend our time so that we may be able to produce some good fruit. But that time will not be unlimited. With all humility let us pray with the Psalmist, **“My sacrifice, God, is a broken spirit; God, do not spurn a broken, humbled heart.”** We are human beings and not angels. So we fail often, but whenever we fail, let us approach Jesus in the confessional with true repentance and with the intention of making changes in our life. **Every Lenten season has only one message for us, repent and change the life.** Lent gives the best opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Penance and start our life anew.