

## 3rd Sunday of Lent C

There was an elderly man who maintained his subscription to the daily newspaper even though he had virtually stopped reading. His neighbor asked him why. The old man said, "Every morning, before I do anything else, I look up the obituary section of the newspaper to see if my name is there. If I don't find my name there, I kneel down and thank God for the gift of another day."

Imagine today's Gospel as giving us a rare glimpse into the obituary section of a Jerusalem daily newspaper one day in the lifetime of Jesus. Perhaps the story that day took up not only the obituary section but also the front page headlines as well: "Blood Bath in the Temple, Pilate Slaughters Suspected Galilean Terrorists," "Tower of Siloam Collapses—18 People Feared Dead." The common reaction of the people of those days to such news of human disaster and misfortune was that it was God's punishment for their sins. The reference to the blood of Galileans is the murder committed by Pilate. Galilee was a hotbed of revolution as Galileans were highly inflammable people. Pilate decided rightly to build an improved water supply system for the city of Jerusalem, and he decided to finance it from Temple money. The Galileans were up in arms against it, and one day they gathered in the Temple to protest. Pilate knew about it and instructed the soldiers to mingle with the crowd in civilian clothes. At a given signal, they were to fall on the mob and disperse them. But the soldiers dealt with the crowd with such violence that a number of people lost their lives. The collapse of the Tower of Siloam mentioned in the Gospel of today refers to the aqueducts built by Pilate for his water project. Eighteen people died when it collapsed. Remember, Pilate used the Temple money for this project. So people began to say that those who lost their lives were punished by God because they had sinned by accepting the money that belonged to God. Jesus utterly denies that. He tells them that those condemning them are not any better than those who lost their lives in those tragedies. Jesus was telling them that if they did not repent and reform their lives, they would all perish as a nation. That did happen in 70 AD when Jerusalem was completely destroyed.

National sin and sufferings are connected. A nation that chooses the wrong ways in the end will suffer for it. We can only reap the fruits of what we have sown. We are sometimes caught up in situations that we did not create and in the end, we too share the suffering. A nation that chooses its policies reaps the fruits of it. A nation that rebels against God will bear its consequences. I would like to read to you a prayer composed by a pastor in Louisville, Kentucky. It caused a lot of media attention and controversy.

*Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and inverted our values. We confess that:*

We have ridiculed the absolute truth of your Word and called it pluralism.

We have worshipped other gods and called it multi-pluralism.

We have got you out of our public life and called it secularism.

We have endorsed sin and called it an alternative lifestyle or co-habitation.

We have redefined marriage and called it equality.

We have neglected the needy and called it self-preservation.

We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare.

We have ignored the stranger and the desperate and called it security.

We have refused to prevent drugs and criminals and called it immoral.

We have killed our unborn and called it our right to choose.

We have mandated contraceptives in health insurance and called it preventive care.

We have shot our abortionists and called it justifiable.

We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem.

We have abused power and called it political savvy.

We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition.

We have polluted the airwaves and electronic media with profanity and hatred and called it freedom of expression.

We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

There's a lot of food for thought here.

When a natural disaster or personal misfortune befalls on other people, some tend to think that they must have done something to deserve it. The right disposition is to realize that it could happen to anybody, and that if it does not happen to us at this time, it is because of God's mercy and love, and not because of what we deserve. Like the story of the fig tree in the Gospel, God gives us more time and repeated opportunities to repent and bear fruits.

We have another opportunity this week. We have the Parish Lenten Mission Sunday to Wednesday at 7 p.m. I invite everyone to come to attend it. Jesus repeatedly says in the Gospel of today, "Unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did." There are people who encourage us, support us, and help us to reform our lives and change our ways. They are the ones referred to as the gardeners who till around and fertilize the fig tree. We need to thank the Lord for them. The parable of the fig tree also teaches us that God may not wait for us infinitely. The Season of Lent provides us with another opportunity to repent and renew our lives. It is a time to dig around and fertilize so that the tree of our life may bring forth the fruits of love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and humble service.