

## Third Sunday of Lent: Making the Best Use of His Time

In today's Gospel Jesus relates current event items to the lives of his disciples. He begins by speaking about a massacre of Galileans by Pontius Pilate's soldiers during a Temple ceremony. Galilee was a political hot bed. Many Galileans were members of the Zealots party, determined to secure Jewish independence from Rome at all costs. Since Galilee is in the North, these Galileans must have come to Jerusalem to celebrate their faith in the Temple. And they must have put on quite a show of Hebrew defiance to Roman rule. Pontius Pilate, in his only act mentioned in Sacred Scripture that was not part of our Lord's Passion, decided to teach these people a lesson. His soldiers invaded the sacred Temple territory, sought out the Galileans, and killed them all. Their families were thrown into mourning. How can anyone make sense of this useless slaughter?

In a second incident, Jesus mentions that eighteen other people were killed when a tower fell in the city of Siloam. Sadly, this is a common tragedy in construction, even in the time of the Lord. But it wasn't an everyday event for the families of the dead. They were in turmoil. How can anyone make sense of their loss?

People have always suffered. Whether it is through disease, or the results of violence, or the result of natural disasters. It is normal for people to ask, as perhaps you have asked, "Has God lost control? Doesn't he recognize what is happening to his people?" In the Gospel for today Jesus says, "God knows," but the time is not yet ready for him to come to judge all people, to bring evildoers to their just ends and to protect the innocent victims of evil. Just as the farmer gives the fig tree one more chance to bear fruit, God gives mankind in general and us in particular a little more time to change our ways. This same teaching is found in the *Book of Revelations* 6:9-10, the Fifth Seal. The Book of God's Plan for mankind is brought forward, but it is bound by Seven Seals. When the Fifth Seal is broken, the blood of the martyrs is heard calling out to God from underneath the Altar of God, "How long O Lord, Holy and True, how long until you judge those who live on earth and avenge our blood." And they are each given a white robe and told to rest until the full number of witnesses to the Lord is complete.

Then God will come with power, the power of his name. Then all people will recognize him just as the Pharaoh of Egypt was forced to recognize who God was after Moses proclaimed God's name in power. When the power of God is revealed then we, who are no longer under a cloud of uncertainty as our ancestors of the Old Testament times were, as St. Paul says in today's second reading, when the power of God comes then we will stand before God and present ourselves and our lives to him.

The fig tree only has so long before it has to produce fruit. We are the fig tree. In all of this, Jesus is saying, "Life is short. Make the best use of whatever time you have."

Life is short, and at the same time, life is a journey. On this journey there is joy

and there is turmoil. There are continual crises. There are continual celebrations. There's the drudgery of everyday chores and the joy of completing our chores with and for the ones we love. All of life has meaning to the extent that we walk with the Lord. We have to take the responsibility of letting him into our lives. He wants to walk with us.

We still have time. It is Lent, the time for us to face up to the evil that is around us and within us.

Lent is the time for reconciliation. Great word, reconciliation. I complain about using this word with our little children, but, really, it is much better than our other terms for this sacrament, confession and penance. These are parts of the one act of reconciliation. Reconciliation means setting ourselves right in our relationships with God and His Presence in His people. Lent is the time for us to recognize our own participation in the cumulative effects of evil in the world. Lent is a time for us to view our own personal tragedies as resulting from the effect of evil on the innocent. Lent is a time for us to ask for forgiveness and courage so that we might bear fruit. Lent is a time for us to face up to our own failings as we recognize that God can and will heal us and help us.

Towers fall. Massacres take place. Loved ones die. But God gives us the strength and the courage to overcome these tragedies.

It is not too late. The fig tree has been given another year. May God give us the courage to use his time and our time wisely. May we bear fruit.