



Sunday 23rd March 2025

The Third Sunday of Lent

Gospel Reading

Luke 13.1-9

Repent or Perish

13 At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² He asked them, ‘Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴ Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.’

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

⁶ Then he told this parable: ‘A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷ So he said to the gardener, “See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?” ⁸ He replied, “Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”’

Other Readings: Isaiah 55.1-9 Psalm 63.1-9 1 Corinthians 10.1-13

Homily

‘When is the right time?’, ‘how long will it take?’ or maybe ‘how long is a piece of string?’ are questions that it is often difficult to answer. We will come back to this later.

We have just read from Luke 13, and, to orientate ourselves, we are in the second half of Jesus ministry, and he is heading towards Jerusalem for what would be the last time.

Pilate has just ‘dealt’ with some Galileans. We don’t know why, but they obviously did something which angered Pilate, and he reacted in a way that would have been shocking to the Jews.

When this event was brought to Jesus, I wonder what the motives were of those asking the questions. I wonder if they wanted Jesus to prove himself and rise up against the Romans for doing such an abominable thing, thinking that their promised ‘Messiah’ was going to free them from oppression and restore the nation. Or maybe they wanted to trap Jesus into being critical of Pilate and so inciting the

anger of the Romans – we know that’s what those who opposed Jesus tried to do at other times.

But if this is the case, then Jesus answers a different question altogether.

Rather than ‘what should be done about the Romans’ he talks about ‘repentance’. This seems a bit odd. Jesus goes on to mention the recent death of some people in the collapse of a tower; we would expect that the people around him would have known about it. ‘Repentance’ would seem to have little to do with these two incidents.

He is pointing out the reality that we will all die. He is saying that whatever the circumstance, be it through an act of violence, or because of an accident, what is important is that our relationship with God is right – ‘repent or you will perish’.

Jesus is clear that what happened to these people was not a punishment for something bad that they had done. We need to repent, he says, so that however it happens, our death isn’t the end. ‘Unless you repent, you will perish’ he says and says it twice, to underline the importance of his words.

But we need to remember that in John 13:3 Jesus says he came that we may *never* perish, but have eternal life.

When God exiled Humans from the Garden of Eden in chapter 3 of the book of Genesis, one of the consequences is that they (and so we) were refused access to the ‘tree of life’ and so the possibility of living for ever. Because of Jesus death and resurrection, we now have that possibility restored to us if we repent and turn to Him.

Jesus encourages us focus on our own relationship with God rather than on trying to judge how someone else’s lifestyle might have contributed to anything that has happened to them. Repent or perish!

He follows this up with an odd parable. A fig tree is repeatedly unproductive, so rather than chop it down now, the gardener offers to dig around it, fertilise it and give it a bit longer then chop it down if that doesn’t work.

The message is simple - God is patient and kind, but that patience and kindness does have limits.

When is the right time to repent and turn to Jesus – well, God is patient but ultimately we have to make a decision. If you haven’t made that decision, I suggest that the right time is now – don’t leave it too long.

Conversation Questions

1. If we are really honest with ourselves, what are our priorities in life? Do we put our relationship with God above other things, or does it get relegated because other life issues become more important ?

2. The problem with the fig tree was that it wasn't producing fruit. How do we understand the idea of 'fruit' in our lives as Christians, what might that fruit be and how can we be more fruitful?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*Almighty God,
whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was crucified:
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,
may find it none other than the way of life and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

(or)

*Eternal God,
give us insight
to discern your will for us,
to give up what harms us,
and to seek the perfection we are promised
in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

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