

Clarity in the ambiguity of life

Homily for October 23, 2021

Inevitable Tragedies: Today's Gospel passage refers to some current events in Israel at the time of Christ: the disciplinary massacre of Jewish worshippers in the Temple by the Roman procurator, and the deaths occasioned by the collapse of a building. Events like these still happen all over our world, every single day. Tragedies and injustices resulting in apparently meaningless suffering are this fallen world's daily bread, as the innumerable headlines of our information-saturated digital culture never cease to remind us. How do we tend to react to them? Many people throughout the ages have reacted by rejecting God. They argue that a good, all-powerful God would never permit such things to happen. And so they walk away from faith in God. Others react as many in Jesus's times reacted, blaming the tragedies on the sins of those who suffered, counting them as a one-to-one expression of divine justice, of divine punishment. How does Jesus invite us to react to such happenings? First, he invites us to see in them the inevitable unfolding of human history—a world broken by original sin will be full of terrible suffering and injustice, no matter how hard we work to promote justice and further Christ's redemption—sin, indeed, concocts its own punishment. We should not be surprised by these events. Second, he invites us to find a spiritual reminder in them. He invites us to use them as an occasion to remember that life on earth is only a journey and that our destination depends on whether we choose to journey with Christ and as Christ. Death, suffering, tragedy comes for us all. If we are living in Christ, they will be for us doors to deeper friendship with him, just as his own crucifixion was the door to his glorious Resurrection.

God's Patience: The parable of the fig tree illustrates God's patience. Although we members of the human family continue to rebel against God, continue to try and create their own heaven on earth apart from God and in rejection of his will, God doesn't give up on us. His Church continues to tend the soil of fallen humanity, fertilizing it with Christ's grace and truth, and God delays the final judgment in the meantime. But he will not delay forever. The lesson Jesus wants us to learn is clear: God's delay is our opportunity. We should see each day as a gift, as a chance to turn around (repent), to welcome God's grace and obey God's will, so as to bear the fruits of wisdom and virtue that he created us to bear. Because of this merciful patience, God's judgment, whenever it comes, will be perfectly just and perfectly loving. But how ready will we be?

Relief from the Tension: Our Lord's discourses in these chapters of Luke's Gospel may seem harsh to us. He tirelessly and creatively reiterates the coming judgment and the urgency of repentance. But we must not forget that these are not the only verses in the Gospels. We know from other passages that Jesus doesn't leave us to figure out repentance and perseverance on our own. He accompanies his Church, and each one of us, with the gift of his Holy Spirit: I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you... The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you (John 14:18, 26). When we live a vibrant partnership with the Holy Spirit, the tension of fear and anxiety is released. Jesus promises this in the very next passage: Peace I leave you; my peace I give to you (John 14:27). In today's first reading, St. Paul reflects on this gift, on what it means to embrace life in the Spirit: For those who live according to the flesh are concerned with the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit with the things of the spirit (Romans 8:5). Living according to the Holy Spirit requires our cooperation. We must make room in our hearts to hear

the inspirations of the Spirit, to learn to recognize his invitations and his nudges. For this, all the great Catholic spiritual writers agree, we need to infuse a healthy dose of silence into our daily rhythms. If our lives are too noisy, the unruly demands of our fallen nature will drown out the call of the Holy Spirit. What place does silence have in my daily life?

Resolution: Lord, today by your grace I will spend at least ten minutes in silence and see how I react—maybe while driving, or simply sitting and gazing at the beauty of nature, or however I am inspired to do so—just in order to gauge how much of the world’s noisiness has infested my own mind and heart.

Conversing with Christ: Dear Lord, I don’t want to live distracted by the tumult and noise of the world around me. I want to see your will at work in all things. I want to live in partnership with the Holy Spirit, fulfilling your will and giving up all my useless worries and vain idols. Teach me to leave aside everything that distracts me from you and your Kingdom, and to seek your face with all my heart.