

3rd Sunday of Lent (C)
(Exodus 3:1-8 / Luke 13:1-9)
23.03.2025

Dear brothers and sisters,

In today's gospel passage, Jesus is interviewed about some events that have just taken place: "The Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices", and "the eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them". These were really distressing events, evil events, and people wanted to know what Jesus thought about them. In his answer, Jesus tells us that these events were not a divine punishment; they were not something inflicted by God on his people for their sins, because God is good. And if God is good, He will not want to inflict evil on his people. A natural disaster, for example, is never a punishment of God for our sins, even if evangelical Church ministers don't hesitate to affirm it is in their preaching! This interpretation is simply not true. Jesus invites us to read these distressing events not as God's punishment for our sins, but as a call to conversion: "Unless you repent, you will all perish as they did". Misfortunes or sorrowful events which are not lacking in our lives must be looked upon as opportunities for reflection, invitations to repent; calls addressed to us to change our way of life, invitations to conversion.

Today, distressing events are not missing all around us! We witness the delusions of grandeur of Vladimir Putin, dreaming of a new Russian Empire! We witness to the Trump administration building up a ferocious isolationism where US profit is the unique supreme value! We witness Israel filled with fear, feeling unable to share with the Palestinian People a land which belongs to God and has been given to Palestinians and Israelis to cohabitate. These are just a few examples of so many disturbing events all around us which are happening today.

As we follow all these events on our screens, small or large, we feel powerless. We are conscious that we can do nothing about them. We are frustrated. Even our prayer seems to be useless.

In today's gospel passage, Jesus opens a way of hope for us. It is true that we cannot change Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump or Benjamin Netanyahu and their administrations, but there is something we can do: we can change ourselves. We can repent and avoid falling into the kind of pitfalls in which these nations are falling right now. We know only too well that one day or another we cannot but be tempted by delusions of grandeur, thirst of gain, or paralyzed by unreasonable fears. When this happens, if we repent, we change the course of our world. The world becomes a better place than if we had merely lamented and felt depressed.

We are called by Jesus to repent, that is to say to choose to follow the way which leads to life; to renounce to follow the way that leads to death. God is God. We are not God. In the narrative of the Burning Bush which we heard in the first reading of this celebration, we were told that God is above all creatures. No creature can gaze on Him and live. When we approach Him, we have to take off our shoes, because He is holy and consequently the Land where He stands is holy ground.

We are not all-powerful; we are not our origin and our end. We are not our own creator; we are not God! We are creatures, children of God, called to live together as brothers and sisters should;

that is to say loving, respecting and serving one another. We are not the owners of the world but its caretakers. We understand now why the search of “the common good” is so important and should be our road map.

How many people think that they are god and behave as if they were god, small gods indeed who think that they can dominate and exploit others... We recognize them by their fruits: they secrete bullying, violence, hatred and wars. With them love, peace and respect are not top of the agenda!

When we are tempted by the lure of power, by the desire to impose ourselves upon others by force; to live by the strength of our own arm, we quickly engage ourselves and others on a path that leads to death, and often without our knowing it. On the contrary, the path that leads to life is all about humble and perseverant dialogue, where we learn to know and understand others, listen to and respect their legitimate differences. This path is not without evoking the synodal way on which the Church is engaged.

When we are tempted by an insatiable thirst for gain or profit, we engage ourselves on the way of unhappiness and death. We read in the Acts of the Apostles that Jesus said: “There is more happiness in giving than in receiving” (Acts 20.35). The way that leads to life and happiness, lasting happiness, is not to amass more and more for ourselves, but to share with others what we have, especially those in need.

Fear paralyzes us. We become wrapped up in ourselves. Fear leads us to death. The Bible opens up a path of life before us, when it invites us to remember the past, to read again and again our own history in order to get an understanding of the present. Remembering is a way of healing which opens up a future. How many times in the Bible the word “remember” appears, how often God’s people are invited to remember... To come back to our history from the beginning helps us to dissolve our fears and leads us on the path of life. A distressing event can become an opportunity for life and peace. We understand the feelings of others; others understand our own feelings, and together we become able to untie the knots in which we have become entangled.

To repent requires a decision. We cannot procrastinate endlessly. We have to engage with it. But repentance takes time and requires a lot of patience. This is the meaning of the parable of the fig tree which gives no fruit. Patience and hope are of the essence. Even if nothing seems to be happening, we have to persevere; we have to hope against all hope. Our repentance will bear fruit in God’s own time. Today’s distressing events will give way to new life.