

GOSPEL*Luke 13:1-9*

Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.'

He told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, "Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down."

A REFLECTION BY POPE BENEDICT XVI*11 March 2007*

The passage of Luke's Gospel that is proclaimed on this Third Sunday of Lent relates Jesus' comments on two events of his time. The first: the uprising of some Galileans, which Pilate repressed with bloodshed. The second: the fall of the tower of Jerusalem, which claimed 18 victims. Two very distinct, tragic events: one caused by man, the other accidental.

According to the mentality of the time, people were inclined to think that the disgrace which struck the victims was due to some grave fault of their own. Jesus instead says: "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans.... Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem?" (Lk 13: 2, 4). And in both cases he concludes: "I tell you, No: but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (13: 3, 5).

This, then, is the point to which Jesus wants to bring his listeners: the necessity for conversion. He does not propose it in legalistic terms, but rather in realistic ones, as the only adequate response to the events that place human certainties in crisis.

In the face of certain disgraces, he warns, it does no good to blame the victims. Rather, true wisdom allows one to question the precariousness of existence and to acquire an attitude of responsibility: to do penance and to improve our lives.

This is wisdom, this is the most effective response to evil on every level: interpersonal, social and international.

Christ invites us to respond to evil, first of all, with a serious examination of conscience and the commitment to purify our lives. Otherwise, he says, we will perish, we will all perish in the same way.

In effect, people and societies that live without ever questioning themselves have ruin as their only final destination. Conversion, on the other hand, while not preserving one from problems and misfortunes, allows one to face them in a different "way".

First of all, it helps to prevent evil, disengaging some of its threats. And in any case, it allows one to overcome evil with good: if not always on a factual level, which sometimes is independent of our will, certainly on a spiritual level.

In summary: conversion overcomes the root of evil, which is sin, even if it cannot always avoid its consequences.

Let us pray to Mary Most Holy, who accompanies and sustains us on our Lenten journey, so that she may help every Christian to rediscover the greatness, I would say, the beauty, of conversion.

May she help us understand that doing penance and correcting one's conduct is not simply moralism, but the most effective way to change oneself and society for the better.

An adage expresses it well: to light a candle is worth more than to curse the darkness.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Pope Benedict says, "people and societies that live without ever questioning themselves have ruin as their only final destination". What might he mean by this?



Heart: Conversion seems to be an ongoing process. Where do you feel called to "conversion" in your life?



Hands: What steps could we take this week to respond to evil with personal commitment to conversion?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.