

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Lent (C)

- Catastrophes, accidents or massacres which take people's lives constantly force people to ask, Why? or Why them?
- Why was President Kennedy shot in the prime of his career?
- Why did Princess Diana die so tragically at the age of 36?
- Why was Gandhi killed just when his country needed him most?
- Why were 50 innocent people shot & killed while they were praying in a Mosque in Christchurch?
- Why did so many die in the bushfires, earthquakes, floods throughout the world this year?
- Why did that young mother die giving birth to her child?
- Why did that young father die of cancer & leave behind a family struggling to survive? - Sadly, none of us can predict our future.
- All of us have to be prepared for the future.
- The Gospel reading for today speaks about sudden & sad tragedies that took place in Jesus' time; he uses these to teach his disciples & us - he begins by noting a tragedy & an atrocity.
- One was an accident: a tower under construction fell in Siloam.
- Eighteen people, workers & bystanders, were killed.
- The second was an unprovoked attack.
- Pontius Pilate turned a Temple service into a bloodbath.
- The centre of opposition to the Roman occupation of Israel was Galilee & the most adamant of the rebels were the members of a party called the Zealots.
- Pilate heard that a large number of Galilean Zealots had gathered in Jerusalem & would be attending a special Temple service.
- Pilate had his soldiers dress as though they were Jews, & mingle in with the crowd & at a given signal, they attacked all those at the service, the Zealots & innocent victims, thus mixing their blood with their Temple sacrifices.
- It seems that some people at the time were saying that this was a punishment of God on these people for moral wrongs they had done.
- Many people believed that God punished people for their or their forebear's wrongdoings.
- Jesus disagrees. "Do you think they were more guilty than anyone else who lived in Jerusalem?" Jesus asks. "Certainly not!" he asserts.
- When people's lives come to a sudden end, whether it is through disease, an accident, due to violence or a natural disaster, we all ask questions like: "Where is God in all of this? Has God lost control? Doesn't God recognize what is happening to his people? If God is all-powerful, then he wouldn't let destructive things happen to innocent people".
- Some just give up on God – if they had any faith, those lose it.
- But it's not that simple – even the destructiveness of disasters is in a large measure, determined by human responsibility.

- I remember the earthquake in Mexico killing 30,000, but if the same intensity of earthquake would have hit a wealthy city, perhaps a few hundred may have died – it all came down to the quality of building.
- Many of the natural tragedies show up our culpability – we could have back-burned; we could have built buildings resilient to earthquakes; we could have better planned the building of dams; we could do more about breaking down barriers that cause prejudice & racism.
- Just as the farmer gives the fig tree one more chance to bear fruit, God gives humanity in general & us in particular a little more time to change our ways.
- It is Lent, the time for us to face up to all that is wrong & evil that is around us & within us.
- We are not animals compelled by natural instincts to a course of action.
- We can change & that is the beauty of being human, but we need help.
- We hardly realise the revolution that Jesus' teaching makes to the functioning of society; responsibility needs to be brought home to those who would otherwise hide behind a religious ideology, or simply the sheer self-interest of evading blame for a situation.
- To identify those really responsible may well require major changes to the way society is organized & that may include us, especially given the fact that we live in a democracy.
- We can try to influence international affairs where we know that the innocent are still massacred by the Pilates of this world & time.
- We can try to influence the workings of our financial system where people suffer whilst others take the profits, like the builders of the Tower of Siloam.
- The time to choose to be in close relationship with Jesus, not just with our words but with the actions of our lives, the time to choose is now, not at some moment in the future when we think we will drastically change & embrace God. That future time might never come.
- Towers fall. Natural tragedies occur. Massacres take place. Loved ones die.
- We call upon God to come now & heal the ailments of our world & those within our own lives & relationships.
- Are we ready to accept God's constant offer of help to change & become who we are called to be & can be?
- Are we a fig tree that is producing fruit, or would we have to be cut down with every other part of creation that has failed to serve its purpose?
- Lent is the time for reconciliation which means setting ourselves right in our relationships with others, God first & then with His presence in His people; as well as our relationship with ourselves & with our environment.
- 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 ask for forgiveness & 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 & will heal us & help us. It's not too late to change & bear fruit.