

### *3 Lent C – Examples inviting Repentance*

In the copy of the Bible I use the words of Jesus in today's Gospel passage are put under the heading 'Examples inviting repentance'. Jesus calls attention to two tragedies familiar to his listeners – how some Galileans had met their deaths at the command of Pontius Pilate, and how some eighteen others had been killed when a tower had fallen down on them.

Our Lord does not accept the idea that these unfortunate people perished because they were worse sinners than any one else – 'they were not, I tell you'. Nonetheless, he says, such undesirable misfortunes can have a salutary effect on others. Why? Because they put us in mind of how precarious our existence is, how vulnerable we are. At any moment an unforeseen disaster can occur. It is as well not to become complacent, or pre-occupied with worldly matters, forgetting the shortness of our lives.

Sudden unexpected death is as much part of our contemporary lives as it ever was. We may live in a technologically more advanced age, but that hardly protects us from harm. In fact, it could be said to increase the variety of opportunity! Recent disasters have re-awoken our sense of vulnerability. They are dreadful events – but they do put us in mind of our own mortality, and that is a saving grace for us.

All the Scriptures today are on the same theme – the need for us to keep in mind why we are here: to bear fruit in righteousness. That is, we are to serve God, and one another in this life, so as to be happy for ever in the next. We called are to look into our lives and see what they are about, on what they focus, which direction they are taking: to check our priorities.

We can presume on nothing. We are counted among the friends of Christ who accompanies us on our journey through life, pointing the way forward, nourishing and refreshing us in the Sacraments. But the Israelites of old were led by Moses and sustained by food and drink from heaven and many never reached the Promised Land. They complained about their hardships. They hankered after earthly pleasures. They failed to please God. 'These things happened as warnings for us: the one who thinks he is safe must be careful he does not fall' (2 Reading).

For many years now there has been an emphasis in our teaching and preaching upon the compassion and mercy of God. In that we are echoing the wisdom of the Psalms: 'It is he who forgives all your guilt, who heals every one of your ills. Slow to anger and rich in mercy, he crowns you with love and compassion'. We see the forgiving nature of God most perfectly revealed to us in the person of Jesus who befriends sinners, and welcomes them into his company. He does not push them away, nor condemn them for their misdeeds. Like the gardener in the gospel story he pleads for each of us to be given another chance. 'Give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year'.

But Jesus also has expectations of his followers. He makes demands. With the complacent and self-satisfied he is severe. He castigates the hypocrites whose actions belie their assertions – who say one thing and do another. There is no room for pretenders in the Kingdom of God.

From all God's sons and daughters, from all of us who claim to be companions of Jesus, the Lord looks for evidence that his Gospel is bearing fruit in our daily life. Our prayers are to be expressed not only in heartfelt sentiments but also in works of charity and justice.

In this season of repentance we are called upon to review our daily lives. Surely there is much in them that is routine, but still opportunities arise in each passing hour. Much of the good that we do will find its expression in the ordinary relationships that make up our normal day at home and at work. But it is good to look over that day as it begins, and as it ends - to pay attention each day to our behaviour and the manner of our speaking. With each day of our life we can grow more pleasing to God, more caring of our fellows, more happy in our heart of hearts.

And more than one fruit grows on a healthy tree. We are to bear abundant fruit. God calls us to be rich in fruitfulness. Each new season in our lives can bring forth a fresh harvest – childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, maturity, and old age. There is always room for our growth as persons. In his spiritual classic 'The Sacrament of the Present Moment' the author Pere de Caussade elaborates on how *each and every moment* is one of grace which can bring forth its own special fruit in our hearts and lives.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is one of the most important ways in which we can regularly look upon the fig tree of our life and see if it is bearing spiritual fruit in works of justice and love. It is a special time when Our Lord, the gardener of the Gospel, attends to our tree, digging round it, nurturing it, encouraging its growth.

The Season of Lent and Easter is the time when each year the Church calls us all back to this Sacrament of Life. The Catechism of the Church published in 1995 reminds us:

*Confession of everyday faults is strongly recommended...Regular confession helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, allow ourselves to be healed by Christ, and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be compassionate as he is compassionate. (#1458)*

As the great St. Augustine of Hippo wrote: "The beginning of our good works is the confession of our evil works. You do the Truth - and so you come to the light." (*In Ev.Jo.* 12,13: PL 35, 1491).

There will be opportunities in our Deanery, our Parish, and in the Cathedral, to avail of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as Easter approaches – these will be given due notice in the Bulletin and in our church lobby areas: we commend them to you.