



LIVING THE GOSPEL

**Third Sunday of Lent
March 23rd 2025**

Theme: "I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Gathering Prayer

All: God, author of every mercy and of all goodness, who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving have shown us a remedy for sin, look graciously on this confession of our lowliness, that we, who are bowed down by our conscience, may always be lifted up by your mercy. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Luke 13:1-9

¹ There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? ³ I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. ⁴ 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? ⁵ I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

⁶ And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷ And he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?' ⁸ And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. ⁹ And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Gospel Focus

In this gospel, Jesus pushes back on a "better them than me" mentality he is finding in his listeners. They seem to believe that they deserve the good things they have received in this life and that people to whom bad things have happened somehow deserves these bad things. Jesus pushes them to greater solidarity, insisting that it is not because of their sins that those bad things happened and that those things could happen to anyone. Bad things happening in the world is an effect of sin, but it is not a direct effect of personal sin. The world is broken by evil, and bad things happen at random to people regardless of how directly they cooperate with that evil.

Gospel Reflection

A well-known evangelical preacher pointed a finger at the people of Haiti, declaring that their own sinfulness had brought down upon them the wrath of God in the form of an earthquake. It's such a simple explanation: if something bad happens, then the victims must have done something to deserve it. That's what Jesus figures people are thinking when they report to him about the people whom Pilate murdered and the people who were killed when a tower fell on them.

There may, indeed, be sinful causes behind these events, but not on the part of the victim. Pilate, who carries out violent execution of innocent people, embodies sin-wracked system. Deaths caused by shoddy workmanship or construction shortcuts, when profit is priced over human safety, are result of sinful practices, but not those of the ones who fall victim. In the gospel, Jesus does not answer the more complex questions of why bad things happen to good people, but he clearly disassociate untimely death from sin and guilt. What he emphasizes in his response is the need to always be prepared-the end could come quite unexpectedly. Are you ready?

The gospel also underscores God's patience in waiting for us to repent and "bear fruit." In Luke's gospel, repentance does not come about by human efforts at reforming our lives. Rather, the process of transformation begins with God's gracious initiative. Our Lenten practices help us to sharpen our ability to be transformed and to respond in such ways that can set us ablaze with divine love, like the bush that caused Moses to turn aside and look.

The examples of people dying in unexpectedly tragic ways are not meant to scare us into repentance. They are sobering reminder, however, our time to respond to the divine invitation is limited. We would not want to miss the opportunity to enter more deeply into the heart of "the One who causes to be what comes into existence," as renowned biblical scholar William F. Albright translated the mysterious divine name in Exodus 3:14, which we hear in today's first reading as "I am."

There is no adequate explanation for sudden, tragic death. Nor is there adequate way to speak of the One Who Is and Who causes All to Be. Yet we long for precise answers to our most difficult questions. Moses insists that he needs to be told the Israelites who it is that sent him. However, God rightly resists any limitations of human categorisation. In ancient cultures, it was thought that knowing another's name gave you power over that one. Not only can we not have power over God, but also any words or images we use are completely inadequate to put into speech who and what God is. As we journey in Lent, it is a good time to let go of any over confidence, as Paul admonishes the Corinthians, allowing ourselves to be enveloped in mystery, to be fashioned anew by the One Who Causes All to Be.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Exodus 3:1-8,13-15

¹ Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ⁷ Then the LORD said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down

to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ...

¹³ Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Responsorial Reading — Ps 103:1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11

R: The Lord is kind and merciful. (R)

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all my being, bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits? **(R)**

He pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills. He redeems your life from destruction, crowns you with kindness and compassion. **(R)**

The Lord secures justice and the rights of all the oppressed. He has made known his ways to Moses, and his deeds to the children of Israel. **(R)**

Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger and abounding in kindness.

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so surpassing is his kindness toward those who fear him **(R)**

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 10:1-6,10-12

¹ I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same supernatural food ⁴ and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. ¹⁰ ...nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Sharing and Discussion

1. In the first Reading, Moses is called by God to lead Israel out of captivity. What special work do you feel is God calling you to do? How have you discerned and answered God's call in your life?
2. In the second Reading, St. Paul admonishes us, "Do not grumble." What is wrong with grumbling? Showing gratitude is the positive alternative, which do you do more?
3. Jesus gives us the parable of the barren fig tree. How might you cultivate the ground to encourage fruitfulness to prevent it from being 'cut down'?

Closing Prayer

All: God our Father, you are patient and merciful. Hear our prayers this day, and may our attention and care for our neighbor draw us out of darkness of self-righteousness and perfect us in our love. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.