

07 March 2010
3rd Sunday of Lent

The Word

Don't be complacent

Lk 13:1-9

In today's readings, the church continues the Lenten message of repentance - with a warning against complacency. In the second reading, the Corinthians seem to be convinced that just because they had the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, they were already saved. Paul warns them that the ancient Israelites in the desert had something like baptism and the Eucharist, yet 'most of them failed to please God.' Paul then reassures his readers that this is meant to be a lesson for them. Those who think they are safe must be careful that they do not fail.

Jesus teaches the same lesson in today's gospel. He refers to two disasters which had happened a short time before: one was a massacre of Galileans by Pilate, the other the killing of eighteen people when a tower collapsed on them. From both these events Jesus draws a warning for his listeners: they must not be complacent and think that they will be automatically saved simply because they are Israelites. Unless they repent, they will perish too.

Jesus reinforces this warning by telling the parable of the fig tree. Despite all the attention given to the tree, it still failed to bear fruit and so was in danger of destruction. This season of Lent with its message of repentance brings the same warning to us. We all need constant vigilance, a constant change of heart, lest we fall into the rut of complacency and false security.

Reflect

Sometimes it can be hard to be patient or forgiving, especially if someone is letting us down all the time. We might give the culprit a second chance, or maybe even a third chance, to change his ways or produce the goods, but that is often our limit. Our tolerance ends there.

The owner of the fig tree in today's Gospel feels the same way. He wants the tree chopped down because it has failed to produce fruit for three years now. But the gardener pleads with him to give the tree another chance. With a little more personal attention and nutrition, he argues, it may bear fruit next year. The owner spares the tree.

We human beings are very like that fig tree. Even though we are followers of Christ, we are prone to failure. We do not always bear fruit, or produce what is expected of us. But luckily for us, Christ is the gardener who is always willing to give us another chance.

And he gives us not three chances or even four, but extends his mercy to as many as seventy times seven. In other words, there is no limit to God's forgiveness.

That is wonderful good news for us but it does demand that we also become more patient and forgiving people ourselves. And that we strive to produce in our lives the fruits of love, generosity, compassion and true repentance that are the hallmark of the Christian.

Do

Look at a tree or shrub. Look at its buds. See the signs of new life. Think about your own life. What kind of fruit are you producing? What steps do you need to take in order to blossom more fully?

Pray

Pray for a deeper awareness of what it means to be a Christian so that all you do will be pleasing to God.

Learn

*God's patience and forgiveness know no bounds.

* The Christian is called to turn to God constantly.

* As Christians we are expected to do more than avoid evil; we are expected to produce good fruit, to do good deeds, to live good lives.

Say

"Lord, help me to bear good fruit. Help me to show compassion and love in my life. Amen."