

Sunday Message

THE WORD

Year C • Psalter Week 3

WHAT DID THEY DO TO DESERVE THAT?

(LUKE 13:1-9)



Depiction of Pontius Pilate washing his hands

This is the second time that the name of Pilate has occurred in Luke's narrative. This Roman official had a reputation for ruthlessly dealing with anyone he saw as a troublemaker, so as we are in Lent, and following Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem, we have a hint of what is to come.

The common attitude of the time was that misfortune was the result of sin, which Jesus seems to accept. But his teaching is that the tragic fate of these people of Galilee does not indicate that they were particularly guilty of any offence more serious than anyone else. Nor were those crushed under a toppling building in Jerusalem. Rather, Jesus is emphasising just how precarious human life can be; his listeners should not take life and health for granted, nor put off being converted and living a decent life under the word of God. A sudden death may not be due to divine punishment, but it may happen all the same.

The second section of our Gospel reading concentrates on the fig tree which fails to produce fruit. A fruitful tree is a sign of God's blessing, and we find examples of the fig, the olive, the grape-bearing vine as positive proof of God's care for the people. We note that the person in charge of the garden argues, politely, with the landowner, to give the plant another and final chance. This echoes the message of the first passage, that no one can put off indefinitely the effort to reorder and reorient their lives. ■

LEARN

Pontius Pilate was finally removed from office for cruelty and exiled to Gaul, part of present-day France.

Personal disaster, such as illness, poverty or other misfortune, was often seen in biblical terms as the result of sin in the person's life.

A good harvest of wheat, figs, grapes, olives was seen as a blessing from God; sterility in a woman, lack of fruit in crops was regarded as God's withholding of blessing.

SAY

The Lord's is the earth and its fullness: the world and all its peoples

(Psalm 24:1)

DO

When you see reports of the next natural disaster, ask yourself what you can do to address climate change.



REFLECT

Recent times have shown us how precarious human life actually is. The forces of nature – wind, storm, flood and fire – have wreaked havoc on our human societies and cities, and on our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. Perhaps it might help our understanding and attitude if we thought of nature as a living force. Then the events which have caused so much suffering to so many people would be not so much due to unpredictable disasters as to human beings upsetting the balance

between ourselves and what we call the "natural world".

If we consider the two examples which Jesus gives in the first part of our Gospel today, we find that the calamities he mentions may well be interpreted, according to the official doctrine of retribution (fidelity is rewarded, disloyalty is punished), as the judgement of God. But if we consider the two cases, we could say that the first is due to the cruel and cynical decision of the Roman governor;

the second may well be attributed to shoddy building workmanship.

One of the unfortunate effects of the Jewish and Christian view of what we call "salvation history" has been the separation of God's intervening in history – in the Exodus event, in the person of Jesus – and the world of nature. If we were to see nature as a living force, protesting violently against human abuse of the environment, perhaps we could better respond accordingly. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

**My eyes are always on the Lord,
for he rescues my feet from the snare.
Turn to me and have mercy on me,
for I am alone and poor.**

COLLECT

O 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, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FIRST READING Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15

A reading from the book of Exodus. Moses was looking after the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, priest of Midian. He led his flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in the shape of a flame of fire, coming from the middle of a bush. Moses looked; there was the bush blazing but it was not being burnt up. "I must go and look at this strange sight," Moses said, "and see why the bush is not burnt." Now the Lord saw him go forward to look, and God called to him from the middle of the bush. "Moses, Moses!" he said. "Here I am," he answered. "Come no nearer" he said. "Take off your shoes, for the place on which you stand is holy ground. I am the God of your fathers," he said, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this Moses covered his face, afraid to look at God.

And the Lord said, "I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers. Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings. I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land to a land rich and broad, a land where milk and honey flow."

Then Moses said to God, "I am to go, then, to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' But if they ask me what his name is, what am I to tell them?" And God said to Moses, "I Am who I Am. This" he added "is what you must say to the sons 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 all time; by this name I shall be invoked for all generations to come."

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM Psalm 102

Response:
The Lord is compassion and love.

- 1. My soul, give thanks to the Lord, all my being, bless his holy name. My soul give thanks to the Lord and never forget all his blessings. (R.)

- 2. It is he who forgives all your guilt, who heals every one of your ills, who redeems your life from the grave, who crowns you with love and compassion. (R.)
- 3. The Lord does deeds of justice, gives judgement for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses and his deeds to Israel's sons. (R.)
- 4. The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy. For as the heavens are high above the earth so strong is his love for those who fear him. (R.)

SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians.

I want to remind you, brothers, how our fathers were all guided by a cloud above them and how they all passed through the sea. They were all baptised into Moses in this cloud and in this sea; all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink, since they all drank from the spiritual rock that followed them as they went, and that rock was Christ. In spite of this, most of them failed to please God and their corpses littered the desert.

These things all happened as warnings for us, not to have the wicked lusts for forbidden things that they had. You must never complain: some of them did, and they were killed by the Destroyer.

All this happened to them as a warning, and it was written down to be a lesson for us who are living at the end of the age. The man who thinks he is safe must be careful that he does not fall.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION
Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God!
Repent, says the Lord,
for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.
Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God!

GOSPEL Luke 13:1-9

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

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 the 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.'"

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH
I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
(all bow during the next two lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS
Be pleased, O Lord, with these sacrificial offerings, and grant that we who beseech pardon for our own sins, may take care to forgive our neighbour. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON
The sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for her young:
by your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.
Blessed are they who dwell in your house,
for ever singing your praise.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION
As we receive the pledge of things yet hidden in heaven and are nourished while still on earth with the Bread that comes from on high, we humbly entreat you, O Lord, that what is being brought about in us in mystery may come to true completion. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE PEOPLE
Direct, O Lord, we pray, the hearts of your faithful, and in your kindness grant your servants this grace: that, abiding in the love of you and their neighbour, they may fulfil the whole of your commands. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lent stimulates us to let the Word of God penetrate our life and in this way to know the fundamental truth: who we are, where we come from, where we must go, what path we must take in life. Pope Benedict XVI

