

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT 2025

READINGS: ISAIAH 55, 1-9 / PSALM 63, 1-9 / LUKE 13, 1-9

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you, our Lord and our Redeemer, Amen.

I guess it is a very human thing, especially in today's culture, to want to have an explanation for everything. In the text of the Gospel we have just heard, people come to Jesus troubled by the news of some Galileans who were brutally killed by Pilate. Jesus adds to this atrocity by mentioning an accident in which eighteen people were killed by a falling tower. It would be natural, at least in Jewish culture, to think that these people were being punished for their sins. And I am guessing that even some of us might think like that about everyday evils which happen to people around them and even about themselves. Somehow we might think that God is ready to punish us for our sin, that he gives a direct payback to some individuals because of their sins.

Yet Jesus is very clear those who were killed were not greater sinners than others. They had no special debt with God that God had to claim back through their death. Jesus does not say why they were killed. And we will probably never know what happened. An ancient Christian writer, Cyril of Alexandria, suggested that those Galileans were probably followers of a false prophet called Judas the Galilean, mentioned in Acts 5, 37, who had rebelled against Roman authorities. And there is no mention in the whole Bible of the accident with the falling tower, but there might have been obvious circumstances that caused it. What Jesus, however, confirms, is that sin does not lead to direct punishment. There is no chart of available fines, where to each sin corresponds a particular punishment. In that imaginary chart the highest fine would be death. But sin certainly has weight. There are consequences. There is a danger of perishing, if we do not repent. And perishing here can also be understood spiritually. The perishing is living a life without meaning, without fruit, and without joy.

Some months ago in another sermon we looked at the word "repent". In the original Greek the word for repent is: *metanoeo*. It seems that this word is following me! It can be translated as meaning "to repent" or "to change one's mind", to change how we think about things. We can think of re-orienting our mind by comparing it to a radio. We can tune to different channels, according to our choice. So Jesus would say: "unless you reorient your mind or, to use the metaphor of the radio, unless you tune into the radio channel I tell you, you will all perish just as they did." Because orienting our mind to sin does lead to a final perishing in the end.

But what does it mean that the mind is oriented, is directed, to sin? It means to have a false idea of God, of ourselves, of others, life, the world and this means ultimately to act against the way that God wants us to follow in. It means to act without love for God, others and for ourselves. So the first step is to re-orient our minds by way of repentance. It can begin with taking time to reflect on a few questions. Do we live with a caricature of God in our minds? Do we think about ourselves really as children of God, or are we stuck in our minds wallowing in our faults and sins, our anger or our pride, or even our self-obsession? Do we see others as

God's gifts, or do we see prejudice and frustration? And in the world do we see the presence of God? Do we see how much love is needed or do we see simply chaos, anxiety and dark clouds?

Sometimes we might wish that God would leave us alone. For a second, we may want to have our "peace" on our terms, and get on with life as we always did. But Jesus says: wherever you are, just now, stop, reflect. Lent is the key moment in the Christian year to take time, even just a little time, to make space for reflection. Even the busiest of us can find 5 minutes a day to make room for reflection. To stop, be still and let God speak in us.

After having reflected and having discovered what we really think about God, ourselves, the world, the question might arise, What next? In which way does God want us to reorient our minds? Which channel should we tune our mental radio to? How should we fill our minds so that we may lead a godly and happy life? We read in Isaiah today: "Listen carefully to me... Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. In the psalm we read: "when I think on you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night". To reorient our minds we must, figuratively speaking, tune in in God's channel. We must learn to listen to God. Listening to God is certainly meditating on Scripture as some of us are doing in Lent groups, or reading the Bible on our own regularly. It is also about having a relationship with God. Talking to him, asking him questions as well as asking him to cleanse our minds and our hearts for all the wrong we have done, praising him...God is there and wants to talk to us! Isaiah says "call upon (the Lord) that he might be found."

Going back to the Galileans and the eighteen who were killed by the tower. It is certainly important to use our minds to understand God, to understand ourselves and the world. But God wants us to learn humility that we are humble enough to know that we are not God and we cannot presume to judge life and all that happens with our own very limited minds. We certainly can try to understand everything, but we sometimes simply cannot. In Isaiah we read "my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts". Today's Gospel invites us to focus our mind on what really matters, to take time to stop, to re-orient our minds, and then to feed them with God's Word and love. It is a constant exercise to feed our minds with God, but it pays out in happiness, in inner peace and in outer fruits. May we long for listening to God everyday! Amen.