

3 Lent C 2019 SML
LK 13:1-9

This evening's/morning's gospel is part of the age old discussions had when bad things happen to good people. Our Blessed Lord hit His listeners right between the eyes with two current events of His day: the Galileans who were killed by Pontius Pilate, and those who were killed by the tower at Siloam:

Pilate was the governor of Judea. Pilate and his way of government were vicious. Visions from the movie "The Passion of the Christ" come to mind. So for Pilate to have ordered a murderous bloodshed of Galileans was commonplace, prompting the wrong question, "Why is God punishing us?"

The tower that fell to which Jesus was referring was the tower that guarded the aqueduct just beyond the southeast corner of Jerusalem. When it fell, it crushed 18 people, prompting the wrong question, "Why is God punishing us?"

Now the early wisdom of Israel had operated on the premise that God rewards the righteous and God punishes the sinner, so that misfortune matches sin and happiness matches doing good. Well, their wisdom had been in crisis at least since the time of the Exile. After the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem in 587 BC, the faithful remnant of Israel was exiled right along

side the unfaithful of Israel. But it was not just the people of Israel as a society who suffered; in private life too, it was becoming more and more apparent (to them) that cynicism pays and that the righteous man is doomed to suffer in this world.

There have been many who have tried, unsuccessfully, to explain why bad things happen to good people.

The idea that God gives people what they deserve, that our misdeeds cause our misfortune, is a neat and attractive solution to the problem of evil at several levels, but it has a number of serious limitations:

- ✓ It teaches people to blame themselves.
- ✓ It creates guilt even where there shouldn't be.
- ✓ It makes people hate God.
- ✓ It makes people hate themselves.
- ✓ And most disturbing of all, it does not even fit the facts.

The problem is: this line of reasoning isn't really meant to help the sufferer or to explain away his suffering, as much as it is meant primarily to defend God, who objectively speaking, does not need to be defended.

Some interpret tragedy as a test from God. Parents of dying children have been urged to read Genesis 22 to help them understand and accept the unbearable cross of burying a

child. In Genesis 22, God ordered Abraham to take the life of his son Isaac. Scholars put forth that God tested Abraham in this way knowing Abraham would pass the test. And therefore, God only sends such tests and afflictions to people He knows can pass the test, and are capable of handling them, so that they and others can learn the extent of their spiritual strength. It's the old saying that God never sends us more than we can handle. Well, If this line of thinking were true, that God is testing us, then He must know by now that many of us will fail the test.

All the responses to tragedy that have been considered here have at least one thing in common. They all assume that God is the cause of suffering, and they try to understand why God would want us to suffer.

- ✓ Is it for our own good?
- ✓ Is it a punishment we deserve?
- ✓ Could it be that God does not care what happens to us?

This kind of logic, or better yet, this kind of "illogic" leads to only one place: "Noir." From time to time, you'll see "Noir" as graffiti. When I was pastor at St. Benedict, someone spray painted "Noir" on the front wall of the Church.

“Noir” is defined as crime, cynicism, that which is bleak, suggestive of danger or violence. Those whose who use “Noir” as their signature delight in the illogic that is as limited as the arguments I just cited. They delight in the despair that would be created if the limited illogic of God were true.

The truth of the matter is “Noir” spray painted on a Catholic Church is a very weak attempt to replace hope with “Noir.” The Catholic Church represents and provides hope every day to billions around the world. The graffiti was spray painted on a Church that teaches that there is another approach to “Noir,” and that approach is found on the inside of the Church, in the Eucharist, in Our Blessed Lord.

Maybe God does not cause our suffering. Maybe it happens for some reason other than the will of God. The answer to the question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” has yet to be determined. The answer has yet to be determined, but you can rule out that the answer is the will of God. Bad things happening in this life are not part of God’s chastisement. God’s mercy comes across loud and clear in this evening’s/morning’s the parable of the fig tree. No punishment from God in this life. Punishment as a consequence of sin, yes. You speed. You get a ticket. It is what it is.

What we do know is tragedy, hardship and suffering, are opportunities to prove character. Why? Because that's the way we're wired. Her husband took faithful care of her for the seven years she was diagnosed with cancer. It was hard, but it proved his character to live up to his marriage vows: for better, for worse, in sickness and in health, until death do us part. It is how he is wired.

Why is her husband wired that way? Because we are created in the image of God, and Jesus is wired that way. Our crucified Lord is wired the exact same way.

When the chips are down, when all seems "Noir," come to Church. Receive Holy Communion. God in your hand. God in your heart. The Church will give you Someone to hope in, and that Someone will give you all the hope that you need, all the mercy that you need, and all the time you need!