Third Sunday of Lent (C)

Gospel text (*Lk* 13:1-9): Some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. Jesus said to them in reply, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them, do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!”

And he told them this parable: “There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none, he said to the gardener, ‘For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. [So] cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?’ He said to him in reply, ‘Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down.’”

“If you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!”

Cardinal Jorge MEJÍA Archivist and Librarian of Holy Roman Church
(Città del Vaticano, Vatican)

Today, the third Sunday of Lent, the Gospel reading contains Jesus' call to penance and conversion. Or, rather, a demand for a change in our lives.

In evangelical language “To convert to” means to change not only our innermost attitude but our exterior style, too. It is one of the most employed themes in the Gospel. Remember that, before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, Saint John the Baptist announced his mission to call others to conversion “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” And, immediately after, Jesus' preaching can be summarized with these words: “Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Yet, today's reading has some characteristics of its own that call for faithful attention and an adequate response. It can be said that the first part of the reading, with the two historic references (the Galileans' blood shed by Pilate and the crumbling of the Siloam tower), contains a threat. It is impossible to

describe it any other way! We deplore the two misfortunes —regretted and cried at that time— but Jesus Christ, most seriously, says to all of us: "—If you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!."

This shows us two basic things. In the first place, the total seriousness of the Christian commitment. And, secondly, if we do not respect it, as God commands, the possibility of our death not in this world but, much worse, in the one to come: the eternal doom. These two stories of death in our text are but examples of eternal death that cannot be compared to the first one.

Each one of us will eventually find out how to face this demand of personal change. Nobody is excluded. But if this worries us, the second part of the reading should comfort us, instead. The "gardener", who is Jesus, begs the owner of the vineyard, his Father, to wait another year. And, in the meanwhile, He will do whatever possible (and the impossible, by dying for us) so that the vineyard may bear fruit. That is, we change our ways! This is the message of Lent. Let us, therefore, take it seriously. The saints changed their ways by God's grace and inspire us to change too. Though late in his life, saint Ignatius of Loyola is one example.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "A secret, an open secret: these world crises are crises of saints." (Saint Josemaría)

- "It must be acknowledged that this same economic growth has been weighed down by malfunctions and dramatic problems. This presents us with choices that cannot be postponed concerning nothing less than the destiny of man, who, moreover, cannot prescind from his nature." (Benedict XVI)

- "The inversion of means and ends, which results in giving the value of ultimate end to what is only a means for attaining it, or in viewing persons as mere means to that end, engenders unjust structures (...). It is necessary, then, to appeal to the spiritual and moral capacities of the human person and to the permanent need for his inner conversion, so as to obtain social changes that will really serve him." (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, № 1887-1888)