Saturday of the Twenty-ninth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Lk* 13:1-9): Some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. He 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!”

P. Francesc d’Assís LEÓN Romero
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Today, the Gospel presents us with two parallel situations: that of the Galileans who were murdered and that of the 18 people in the tower of Siloam (cf. Lk 13:1–5). Even though these men have suffered this punishment, it does not mean that those who have not suffered it are exempt from guilt and conversion. This is the heart of today’s Word: the need that “all of us” have for conversion—to turn our hearts completely toward God—and to do so continually, until our hearts reach the measure of Christ, for “God loves you just as you are, but he dreams of you being even better!” (Leo XIV).

The punishment that God inflicts on us as a consequence of personal sin may be temporary or medicinal and is intended precisely to bring about our conversion. But punishment can also be final and irrevocable, and we believe this is the case in hell for those who have definitively closed themselves off from salvation. For Saint Anthony Mary Claret, the thought that some souls might face such a fate was so horrifying that it profoundly shaped his apostolate; calling sinners to conversion became the very heart of his preaching.

In the parable of the fig tree (cf. Lk 13:6–9), we see that God awaits our conversion and provides us with opportunities for it. Yet—take heed! —this will not last indefinitely; and that is why “It is today, not tomorrow, that we must repent” (Leo XIV).

However, the motive of conversion, although at first it may be this fear of punishment, is called to be primarily the contemplation of the humanity of Christ and his personal love for us, incomparably more pleasant and joyful than any of the most intense pleasures in this world!! Thus, the true crucible of our conversion lies in something as simple as prayer and humility. Prayer and humility! Prayer and humility! Prayer and humility!

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "You were within me but I was outside myself, and there I sought you! In my weakness, I ran after the beauty of the things you have made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The things you have made kept me from you – the things which would have no being unless they existed in you!" (Saint Augustine)

- "Authentic faith, open to others and to forgiveness, works miracles. The fig tree represents infertility, a barren life, incapable of giving anything. Jesus curses the fig tree because it made no effort to bear fruit” (Francis)

- "Sin is present in human history; any attempt to ignore it or to give this dark reality other names would be futile. To try to understand what sin is, one must first recognize the profound relation of man to God, for only in this relationship is the evil of sin unmasked in its true identity as humanity's rejection of God and opposition to him, even as it continues to weigh heavy on human life and history" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n 386)

Other comments

“He came in search of fruit on it but found none”

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Today, the words of Jesus invite us to reflect on the danger of hypocrisy: “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” (Lk 13:6). The hypocrite pretends to be what he is not. This falsehood reaches its peak when someone feigns virtue (in the moral sense) while living in vice, or pretends devotion (in the religious sense) looking out for himself and his own interests instead of God. Moral hypocrisy abounds in the world; religious hypocrisy harms the Church.

Jesus' criticisms against the scribes and Pharisees—clearer and more direct in other passages of the Gospel—are truly severe. We cannot read or listen to these words without feeling them pierce to the depths of our hearts, if we have really heard and understood them.

Let me speak in the first-person plural, because all of us experience the gap between what we appear to be and what we truly are. We are hypocrites when politicians exploit their country while claiming to serve it; when law enforcement protects corrupt groups in the name of public order; when medical professionals suppress lives—either at their beginning or their end—in the name of medicine; when the media distorts the truth and corrupts people under the pretext of entertaining them; when public administrators divert funds into their own (personal or party) pockets while boasting of their honesty; when secularists restrict religion's public presence in the name of freedom of conscience; when religious men and women live off their institutions in infidelity to the spirit and demands of their founders; when priests live from the altar but fail to serve their parishioners selflessly in a true Gospel spirit; and so on.

Ah!—you and I as well, to the extent that our conscience tells us what we must do, yet we fail to do it, preferring instead to focus only on the speck in our brother's eye while ignoring the beam that blinds our own. Isn't that so?

—Jesus, Savior of the world, save us from our small, medium, and great hypocrisies!