

### Third Sunday in Lent (3/7/10 – *Behold, the Son of God, Who Is Cut Down for You*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Do you think that those Chileans in Concepción were worse sinners than all the other Chileans, because they have suffered these earthquakes? *No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all in the same way perish.* [LK 13.3] Or those Haitians who likewise were shaken and died – do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in the western hemisphere? *No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.* [LK 13.5] Or those New Orleanians hit by Katrina ... or those Indonesians hit by the tsunami ... or those northeasterners hit by winter storms ... or those who have lost their jobs ... or those girls down in Escondido ... or ... and the list could go on ... for years ... decades ... centuries. Some – like the United States’ own Pat Robertson – would say emphatically: *Yes! Yes they were worse sinners ... worse offenders! That’s why they suffered such great tribulation.* And even our own minds wander in that direction sometimes – when someone we know or even people we don’t know in the news suffer greatly ... and die in the process. Is this their punishment for their sins? Did they simply get just what they deserve?

Notice that our Lord Jesus Christ does **not** go in the direction that the people asking were probably wanting Him to go. The Jews gathered around Him that day were used to thinking in such terms – that wealth and a life devoid of woes was a sign of God’s favor ... and that poverty and a life full of disasters was a sign of God’s displeasure and wrath. And so are we used to thinking that way. It is the way our corrupted flesh thinks. And the devil is quite happy to prod us into going that direction – for if someone gets their “comeuppance” because they were **worse** ... well that lets me think **I might not** because I’m just a little bit better. The devil is content, indeed, to guide us down this path of faulty thinking – because then we won’t face the real question ... and seek the real and only solution to our **own** sin problem.

Jesus responds **not** with: *Oh yes, those Galileans were terrible sinners. It*

*should be little surprise that their own blood was mixed with their Passover sacrifices. Yes, Pilate is a bad man ... the henchman of that bad Roman government that is lording it over you. But, those Galileans had it coming anyway. They just got what they deserved. You deserve better – and one day the Messiah will throw off the bonds of these Romans and you will be free.* That's the kind of response they were probably looking for. That's the kind of answer the world often looks for. And even we sinners in the Church seem to expect – at times – just such an answer from our Lord.

But instead, Jesus responds by directing His hearers – including you and me – to look at **ourselves** and our **own** sin problem. *No, I tell you* – it's not direct cause-and-effect like you think ... it's not because they were worse sinners, worse offenders than you ... **you are also** a terrible sinner ... and **you** deserve just what they got ... so sit up and take notice – *unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.* And Jesus **means ALL!** Unless I ... unless you ... repent of our sins ... **daily**, you and I will all likewise perish – not just by being victims of an intolerant government ... or squashed like a bug under some building like so many caught in recent earthquakes ... but **eternally** ... in the second death that comes after Judgment.

To bring home His point about the need for repentance – and the faith that goes with it – our Lord tells a parable ... about an unfruitful fig tree in a vineyard. We've heard this parable before – though much shorter ... and from another. God has spoken this Word **before** through the prophet and forerunner of Christ, John the Baptizer ... who said: *Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.* [LK 3.9] Before this stark warning of the Law, John had exhorted the people to *bear fruits in keeping with repentance* [3.8]. God has said this all before – but we need still need to learn it ... take it to heart ... repent ... and turn back to God in faith.

In Jesus' parable, the Vineyard Owner is God the Father ... Who has shown considerable patience with a certain unfruitful fig tree – that is, with

us sinners ... when we are impenitent and unfruitful in our lives. For three years He has given all things necessary for this tree to bear fruit – good soil, fresh air and sunshine, the early and late rains. But for three years it has been unfruitful – impenitent. Still, the Vinedresser – our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – intercedes on your behalf: *Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, You can cut it down.* [13.8-9] The Lord would yet apply His efficacious and nourishing Word – His Law and Gospel – to your life ... that His Holy Spirit might work repentance and renewed faith.

Now the Divine Vinedresser's work in your life may be somewhat painful at times. The shovel of the Law digs around in your life – uncovering your sin and baring the root of your problem ... namely, your corrupt, sinful flesh that is constantly falling into sin. Sometimes you may feel smothered ... either in the stench of the hurt your sin has caused ... or by the trials and tribulations God allows to come your way. But Your Vinedresser does it all with this blessed purpose: that you see your own need ... that you repent of your sin ... and that you turn again to Him.

For you see, Your Holy Triune God has *no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live* – as we heard God say through Ezekiel in our *Old Testament Lesson* [EZE 33.11]. Everything God does – even the punishment of those who ultimately remain impenitent and unbelieving – is for your example and instruction [1COR 10.11] ... to draw you away from your wickedness and toward Him and His mercy, love, and forgiveness for the sake of your Savior Jesus Christ.

But even more than that ... much more! The Lord – your patient, careful, and caring Vinedresser – will take your place ... and make Himself as an unfruitful fig tree ... as one of those Jerusalemites on whom the tower of Siloam falls ... as one of those Galileans slain by Pilate. **Jesus** becomes your sin and your wickedness and your impenitence – and the Father orders **Him** to be cut down ... cut off from this earth ... by that most cruel

suffering and death of the cross.

***Behold, the Son of God, Who Is Cut Down for You!*** Your Savior makes Himself the worst sinner – the greatest sinner ... the sinner of sinners – and takes your place. His Blood isn't just mingled with His sacrifice – His Blood **IS** the Sacrifice ... the once-for-all Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. This GALILEAN is your Passover Sacrifice – Who *suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried*. His Blood marks the doorposts and lintel of your soul. When the angel of death sees you clothed in Him – through Baptism and your return to your Baptism through daily repentance ... and faith that clings to Christ and His work – that angel must sheath his deadly sword and pass over you. You **will not** perish!

***Behold, the Son of God, Who Is Cut Down for You!*** Your Savior allows the tower of Siloam to fall upon Him. The tower of men's sinful pride and rebellion against God, against His holy will, and against His eternal kingdom comes crashing down upon Jesus. But He is the ***Stone the builders rejected, that has become the Cornerstone*** [PSA 118.22]. He is the spiritual Rock that follows us through this wilderness of sin so that we might drink of His fountain of life and live. You **will not** perish!

***Behold, the Son of God, Who Is Cut Down for You!*** Look to Him when you are tempted. He is your faithful God ... Who has Himself endured the worst of the worst for you ... has escaped the jaws of death to bring you life ... and provides you the way out by the eternal fruits He brought forth by His Cross. In Him you find the perfect fruits of faith – ***love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*** [GAL 5.22-23] – all brought forth and given to you by grace. You **will not** perish!

***Behold, the Son of God, Who Is Cut Down for You!*** Your Vinedresser makes Himself as barren for you, so that the Vineyard Owner's righteous wrath at your unfruitfulness may be poured out on Him. And you, in exchange, live in the Vineyard of His Kingdom forever. You **will not** perish!

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]