

# Sunday Homily

## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

20 MARCH 2022

YEAR C

“Do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you.”

Luke 13:4-5

### Illustration

Just imagine the furore which would arise if anyone suggested that the victims of the Holocaust, or innocent children killed by a paedophile ring, had “brought it on themselves”? And yet there was once a school of thought which assumed that if something terrible happened to you, it must be some kind of “payback” for past bad behaviour on your part, or on the part of your family.

Jesus confronted this question directly from one questioner, putting him right. The idea that innocence should be blamed for evil is abhorrent, going against everything we understand about justice. But in the past people had to find meanings for terrible things which happened. Even now, people generally dislike mysteries and uncertainties, unless they can dress them up in creative and beautiful stories, preferably with happy endings, which soften the anguish which uncertainty can generate. They often create meanings, or, worse, identify people upon whom blame can be laid: scapegoats, like people of a different colour or social class, ethnic group or religion. In ancient Israel it was the victims of disaster themselves. As if it were not bad enough to have been made an unintentional victim in the first place, to then be blamed for your own misfortune!

### Gospel Teaching

Jesus tries to remove for ever the notion of personal blame through sin for accidents and unavoidable disasters, like blindness from birth. But he implies that if people do not work to change their lives, to accept his promises and have faith in God, they might end up worse off than those whose disasters he describes. Not because God will impose punishments upon those who stray (after all, elsewhere Jesus tells us about himself as a loving shepherd who goes out of his way to rescue a sheep which has strayed). But we call down upon ourselves all kinds of risks when we do not accept the best that is on offer. That is, Christ himself and his relationship with God, of which we are heirs and which contains everything necessary for happiness.

What he is asking of us is a light burden and may save us from a much worse fate. There is terrible uncertainty about living without God, with no foundation which

will bear our weight when we need to lean on something or someone other than ourselves in time of trial. The foundation which Jesus offers, the strength which will carry us through when tragedy strikes, is love. Not the tabloid newspaper notion of love, which disperses like summer mist when the first trials occur. But the love which seeks justice, which tolerates hardship and welcomes difference, love which endures in spite of our weakness.

Jesus offers us both the opportunity to accept the love which strengthens and enables us to grow, and also the ability to see beyond the superficial in others and to love them unconditionally as Christ loves us. It is upon this foundation that a perfect world (the kingdom) will be built. It was love which designed the incarnation, love which inspired Mary, love which carried Jesus through his ministry to his passion and death. It was such love which conquered death, for him and us. But, Jesus makes clear, without adopting his brand of love, and following in his footsteps, we place ourselves and the future of the world in greater uncertainty and at greater risk.

## Application

Jesus invites us to arm ourselves against possible disasters and to be able to cope when they occur. But even Jesus cannot make himself responsible for us and our safety if we ignore his warnings and his teaching, however much he might desire to do so. But he goes on giving us “another chance”. One of the secure aspects of Christianity is that every day we wake, we can turn over a new leaf and try afresh to live well.

If we are serious in our intention to become the people Christ calls us to be, then love is our yardstick and action is our proof. Love is the measure of the Christian because Jesus loved unto his very death, which is about as far as it goes. The horrendous acts of people against their neighbour are not a failure of love on the part of the victim, but in the perpetrator who has ignored Christ and his warnings. We are made for love and it is this love which will save us and our world.