THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT–2019

Getting ready for this weekend’s homily, as I looked at today’s Gospel, I couldn’t help but think of the people who were killed recently by a gunman in New Zealand, along with so many others whose lives ended suddenly, tragically or violently. We can only guess as to how many of them began their day without a thought about what was going to happen. What about those in Nebraska who are experiencing the devastating effects of the weather and the changes in climate? Like in the Gospel, we might be tempted to ask, “What did the people do to deserve what happened to them? The people in New Zealand were in prayer. They were basically doing something good and holy.” And when we think of all these types of things happening in all those other troubled spots in the world, we are confronted with a very real dilemma: How do we reconcile this with our belief that our God is a loving and caring God. This is nothing new. It really is an age-old dilemma and question.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus mentions the two sad events and it’s almost as if he is trying to get the people to say that these happened because the people were not living the way they should. But, if you notice, Jesus doesn’t even try to answer the question of why these things happened. Inside, he tries to put a positive and very challenging spin on it in the sense that he says, if we don’t use our time well, bad things are going to happen to us. That same message comes out loud and clear in the second reading. Don’t get lulled into thinking that there is nothing that we really have to worry about.

What Jesus and Paul try to do is help us to focus on one of the most precious gifts that each of us, no matter who we are or what we have or don’t have. That gift is time, and that we need to use that time right now to do what we really need to do and to change what needs to be changed in our lives. We shouldn’t put off what we need to do now or make those changes we should be making, for we may not have the time we think we have. Life isn't predictable and we shouldn’t let our daily patterns lull us into a complacency which could be very dangerous, hurtful and sorrow producing. It may be later than we think and we know that life doesn't come with guarantees except the certainty of death.

To emphasize this point Jesus tells the parable of the fig tree which represents the people of Israel and each of us. Fig trees required a lot of care. Normally, it took three years for a fig tree to bear fruit which was quite an investment of time, money, work and patience. When the owner of the orchard told his gardener to cut down the fig tree, it made good sense because it didn’t produce any figs in the expected three years. “So, cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?” The tree should have been replaced by a new one that would produce fruit in due time. But the gardener gets the owner to allow the tree another year. However, while there is a brief reprieve, there is still a deadline.

You might have heard the story of the two men who were talking about their friendship. One of
them said, “Bill, we’ve been friends for 25 years and there is nothing we wouldn’t do for each other.”

And the other man said, “And Charlie, that’s what we’ve been doing for one another for 25 years. Absolutely nothing.” As a follower of Jesus that’s the worst thing you can do in the light of the parable of the fig tree: Nothing!

Important is to remember those that are condemned by Jesus are those who have done nothing. Remember the end of time parable and the sheep and the goats. Those who were sent to hell were those who didn’t do anything to help others. Remember the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man went to hell not because he hurt Lazarus; he did nothing to help him. Remember the parable of the talents. The man who buried his talent and did nothing with it was cast out into the darkness.

While this appears to be a warning, we can and we should put a positive spin on it, that is, while we have the gift of time and before it runs out, we still have the opportunity to grow and mature emotionally and spiritually, we can reform our lives, serve the Lord and remove the obstacles, between God and us and between us and others. Once again, let us remember that time is a gift and even though, at times daily life may seem too routine and/or a hectic grind, we need to make the time to see God lovingly reaching out to us in the events of our daily lives, and through the gift of our family and friends. We need to remember that God is very, very patient and that as long we have time, it is never too late to do what we need to do or make those changes that we need to.

I’d like to close with this little prayerful reflection. Lord, help me so that “Someday” and "one of these days" become less and less a part of my vocabulary. If it's worth doing or saying, what am I waiting for? I'm not sure what others would have done had they known they would not be here for the tomorrow that we all take for granted. I think they would have called family members and a few close friends. They might have called a few former friends to apologize and mend fences for past misunderstandings and pettiness. It's those little things left undone that would make me angry if I knew my time was limited. Angry because I hadn't written certain letters that I intended to write one of these days. Angry and sorry that I didn't tell often enough those I love and those dear to me how much I truly love them. Lord, help me not to put off, hold back, or save anything that would add joy, laughter or comfort right now. Lord, help me remember that time is a very special gift. And even though life may not be the party we hoped for, while we are here and still have time, as we have heard from our patron St. Francis, “While we have time, let us do good.”