

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

We often here about some especially tough news, when we get out of our daily routine and talk with others about deep issues. Issues that do not have readily apparent, or clear answers in our world.

And, along comes Jesus to us today, and he says

“Do you think that all those children who were shot to death in Newtown, Connecticut were worse offenders, or sinners, than the other children in the area who survived? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

Don't you just hate that? “C'mon, Jesus! I'm just here in Rome, NY/Canastota. Like most others, I am really confused as to why these poor, innocent kids end up dying in this tragedy. And what!? You tell me I am going the same way unless I repent? I am not anywhere NEAR Newtown!

And then I remember that little 10-year old girl killed some ten years ago in Oswego County when a semi truck runs through a stop and T-bones her mother's minivan. Her surviving parents were very strong in their faith, and were on the TV news that night. They were almost tearful in their pain for who? The truck driver!! Now, THAT is news!

And, when I ponder on that tragedy, Jesus still whispers in my ear...”**That child was no worse than any others, but unless you repent, you will perish just as she did.**”

I have the same reaction that the hearers of Jesus did. How does **that help me**, Jesus? I did not drive that truck, even if it was a complete accident. What is up with that?” Well, whenever we have **real life** questions, we return to scripture and ask the Holy Spirit to help make sense out of it in today's world.

As for mixing of Galilean blood with that of their sacrifices, we have no historical record of this event. But, it was not out of character for the Romans. Although they tolerated the Jews, they would occasionally flex their muscles with them. For it to have happened at a liturgical event of sacrifice would have been fitting from the Roman intention of showing who is in control because religion and politics were the same for the Jews. This would have overwhelming symbolic meaning. What could be worse for them than being unclean?

First century Jews had a notion of order. **Certain people suffer bad things because they are out of favor with God.** And we, or others around us, sometimes justify the otherwise unexplainable in this way. Just like some fundamentalists said that Hurricane Katrina was God's punishment upon us for unleashing an unjust war in Iraq.

We all react to bad news. And, we can imagine the excitement of those telling Jesus about the mixing of blood. Wanting, even hoping, for his proclamation of the apocalypse, because maybe this was their punishment from God.

But they are disappointed. Jesus does not do what they..or we...expect. He completely removes any link between God and what happened. The events themselves do not concern him. Instead, he turns his attention entirely on their **reaction** to those events. What their reaction says about whose power they are in.

If we are caught up in thinking like that, then we also are likely to act in ways moved by the apocalyptic other, the “little g” god of blood and sacrifice and murder. Of morality linked to worldly outcome....and we will perish like them.

Then, there is the tower of Siloam falling. To push his point home, Jesus continues with an example where there was no obvious moral point, no wicked Pilate, no mix-up of sacrifices. Instead, maybe an architectural flaw, a small earth tremor, the shifting of an underground stream, who knows? It is enough to remind one of that sink hole in Florida which swallowed up and killed that sleeping man, whose body will now never be found.

Once again, Jesus completely de-sacralizes the incident. It has nothing to do with God. But if we are caught up in the world of giving sacred meanings, then we will be caught up in the world of reciprocal violence. Of good and bad measured against other people, and we will likewise perish.

So, Jesus preaches the need to repent. The need for “conversion” which, in Greek, is "metanoia.", literally means "beyond the mind." So, it is an idea of stretching or pushing beyond the boundaries with which we normally think and feel...and the way which we “normally think and feel” is to act the part of God. The real story of the Garden of Eden is mankind’s natural need to make judgments about others, to take the place of God. To look at someone else and think “she’s too this”, or “he’s too that”.

Jesus wants us to drop all that. To let God be God. That pushing beyond the boundaries is allowing God to really take an active role in our formation as children of God, not as co-equals with God. With the parable closing our gospel reading today, Jesus is really pointing forward. Looking to the future. Giving them a glimpse of what is to come although the apostles themselves could not begin to understand it until after the resurrection of the Lord.

Jesus understood full well that, for God, death does not exist. That a person loved and sustained by God is not something which is interrupted or diminished by death. Jesus was able to conduct his life in a way that was not moved by death. He was not running from death, or even running toward it in a self-destructive way, which tends to be our problem.

We even use phrases in our common speech that, while they may seem “tongue in cheek”, show a fatalistic viewpoint....phrases like being “worked to death”, or being “taxed to death”. Jesus shows us another reality. Death was not a reality which marked his imagination, since his imagination was entirely fixed on the creative and living presence of God who does not know death.

As a result, Jesus, more so than anyone else, was able to see what was going to happen to him. He was able to go to the cross as if it were not a death at all, but instead a sign so that others might live in the same way.

When we speak, then, of God as love, it is not as if he loved us by throwing Jesus to us as if we were a pack of hungry crocodiles. Instead, God's love for us is the love by which Jesus was empowered as a human being to create for us the experience of the resurrection. The apostles needed to reconstruct what Jesus had stood for during his life, which they could only understand AFTER the cross and resurrection experiences. That very story remains the central point of our hope, the real reason why we come here.

God was present at the cross, as the source of the loving self-giving which brought into existence the possibility that we humans might overcome death and its dominion in our lives.

All modern death is accidental. It has no meaning. Unless we undergo a *metanoia*, unless we do as he commands and “repent” our death will be an accident. Just like that of those poor Newtown children shot to death, or those 18 crushed by the falling tower of Siloam. It will have no meaning. And, if death is meaningless, so is life.

But, if we have the Christian **metanoia**, which requires the cross, then death becomes the moment of truth. An opportunity to lay down one's life in a final act of self-surrender. A kind of conquering of death, the way Christ conquered it.

Jesus is really a revealer....the icon of the living God. Bearing the fruit of God's way of peace. Our Lord comes to us in the Sacraments to dig around us and spread the fertilizer. He feeds and waters us with faith in us. Because he was able to live God's way of peace, we can as well.

May we have the presence of heart and mind to surrender ourselves to the conversion, or **metanoia** of Christ, in order to see...let alone live...into the vision of real life that God yearns for us, always and ever interwoven within the relationship of God revealed to us in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.