

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent, Cycle C March 7, 2010

Readings: Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15; 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12; Luke 13:1-9

### Repent or Perish

There are two worlds: the natural world and the supernatural world. They are different but they can exist in the same time and place. We live in the natural world, but it behooves us not to forget or ignore the supernatural world which is all around us. It is the world of God and of the angels and saints and demons and spirits and lost souls. I was at a conference yesterday and one of the speakers, who had come from the Vatican, brought with him relics of St. John Vianney and Padre Pio. It was a good reminder that we can pray for the supernatural assistance and intercession of the saints. God created our natural world and put laws, such as gravity, in place to control it. But since God has created and controls the natural world, He can suspend the laws of nature when He desires. And this is when we have miracles.

Moses saw the miracle of the burning bush, the bush that was burning yet not consumed by the fire, and it drew him closer. (Sometimes God uses miracles to get our attention.) And God spoke to Moses from that burning bush and told him His name: "***I am.***" In philosophy class, we looked at sentences that we called composites. We could look at these sentences to determine if they were true. These sentences would contain a subject that could then be linked to a predicate that would put some qualifier on the subject. For example we could say: "The house is blue." The adjective *blue* puts limitations on the subject, *house*, because not all houses are blue. We could look at our statement, *the house is blue*, and determine if it was true or not. Other sentences, or composites, might be: *I am hungry*, *I am tall*, *I am in this room*, or *I am heavier than when I graduated from high school*. There are limitations or qualifications that I must use when I describe myself and my existence.

But this is not true with God. God is without limit. So when God describes Himself, he says simply: "***I am.***" There are no qualifiers or limitations we can put on God. It's difficult for us to comprehend with our limited human brains, but it is important for us to remember. It is the basis for our humility; the basis for accepting that we cannot always understand God's ways. And this helps us to cope and move on when disasters occur.

In our gospel story this morning Jesus refers to those who had died at the hand of Herod and those who had died when the tower of Siloam fell on them. And He asks: "***Do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem?***" And we can consider the over 200,000 who died in the Haiti earthquake in January; some claimed that God was punishing them for the voodoo practices. We can consider all those who have died in the Chile earthquake in February. And we can ask the same question: *Were they more guilty than everyone else?* Jesus' reply to the people was: "***By no means!***" And I'm confident that His answer would be the same today.

But Jesus continued His response by saying: "***But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!***" Jesus tells us not to try to determine if others are guilty, but first to look and see if our own house is in order. Does God create disasters, or does He simply allow them to occur? It's unclear, but it is clear from Jesus' words that we should

take note of these disasters as a reminder of our own mortality; as a reminder that we need to repent so that we will be prepared if we are caught in the middle of some disaster; if, for example, we are in a fatal accident on the way home from church today.

We can learn by what happens to others, how we ourselves should behave. St. Paul this morning recounts how the Israelites saw miracles and received all kinds of blessings as they were freed from captivity in Egypt. But still the people complained and so God punished them and made them wander for forty years in the wilderness. St. Paul says: ***“These things happened as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil things, as they did.”*** He warns us against complacency and adds: ***“Whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall.”***

Do you think you are standing secure before the Lord, ready to meet your maker? This Lent, let us remember not to be complacent. Do not slip into a false sense of security; do not desire evil things. We will all die someday. It may not be next month in another earthquake or some other natural disaster, but our end will come. We just do not know the time. Only God knows; He is in control.

Our role is to be prepared for that time when we lose our natural lives. We can be thankful that we have not died yet; that God continues to give us a chance to turn our lives around, a chance to repent and turn away from a desire for earthly things to a desire for the things of heaven. If we are like the fig tree in the gospel that gave no fruit, we can be thankful that God keeps giving us second chances. Jesus does not want to lose any of our souls. He is like the gardener in the story talking to His Father: ***“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.”***

Let this Lent be a time to strengthen your commitment to be fruitful. Let it be a time to let yourself undergo a little spiritual cultivation and fertilization, and probably also a little pruning of your earthly attachments. Ask your guardian angel and the saints for help in your fight against the temptations of the evil one. Remember that as you go about your natural life, there is an ongoing supernatural battle for your eternal soul.

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