

“There’s a reason for everything”-- that’s what we often say and hear; and we know occasionally it appears to be true in our lives.

In today’s Gospel text, Jesus is dealing with the same issue. If we read the text, it is a little strange; Luke says some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And there is another piece; it says there were 18 people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them.

But that was it. Luke does not give us the details of those two incidents. So we do not know exactly what they were.

One thing we know from historians is that as a way of winning the hearts and minds of Jewish people, Pontius Pilate was expanding a channel to bring water into Jerusalem. Many Galileans workers were hired to work there. But the Jewish people thought those Galileans were sinful because they were working for the hated Romans and being paid with money from the sacred treasury taken by force by Pilate.

But this incident happened; 18 of those Galilean workers were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them.

Everyone in Jerusalem thought “Well, those Galileans who died deserved what they got; there was a reason for their death.”

Here is Jesus saying: "Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans because they died that way?"

"No," Jesus tells the crowd, "but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did."

The gospel of John addresses this same issue with the same conclusion from Jesus. Jesus and his disciples saw a man who had been born blind. The disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2).

The question assumes an express correlation between sin and suffering. Jesus rejected this notion saying, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" (v.3).

Some of you know what Pat Robertson said when there was an earthquake in Haiti two months ago. He said that the country has been "cursed by one thing after another" because of the country's deal with the devil."

It is so unfortunate to hear this kind of statement while millions of other Americans felt not only sad but also tried to do what they could to help those victims and their families.

If you read the Old Testament such as Ezekiel 14:23

You will be consoled when you see their conduct and their actions, for you will know that I have done nothing in it without cause, declares the Sovereign Lord,"

It is clear that God sometimes punishes his people. God does that when his people do something wrong and He wants them to change.

That's what the people of Israel believed and that was why King David says in Psalms (23:4): "Your rod and your staff comfort me." Even though they might get "hit" once in a while, they knew it was ultimately for their own good.

But that does not mean every disaster, every disease, every suffering is from God. I don't think it is fair to say that God is always behind everything that happens here.

While it is true that our sin can lead to serious problems in our life, Jesus rejected the idea that there is always a direct correlation between our sin and suffering.

Accidents happen. Disasters happen. Sufferings come into our lives. But the mystery is that we do not have all the answers why these things happen.

Rabbi Simmons tells a story. There was a farmer who owned a horse. And one day the horse ran away. All the people in the town came to comfort him. "Oh, I don't know," said the farmer, "maybe it's a bad thing and maybe it's not."

A few days later, the horse came back to the farm, not by himself but with 20 other horses. (Apparently he had found some wild horses and made friends!) All the townspeople came to the farmer and said, “Wow, congratulations! How lucky you are! You have a stable full of horses!” “Oh, I don't know,” said the farmer, “maybe it's a good thing and maybe it's not.”

A few days later, the farmer's son was out riding one of the new horses. The horse got wild and threw him off, breaking the son's leg. So all the people in town came back to comfort the farmer. “Oh, I don't know, maybe it's a bad thing and maybe it's not.”

A few days later, the government declared war and ordered a draft of all young men. But the farmer's son did not have to go because of a broken leg. “Now I know,” said the farmer, “that it was a good thing my horse ran away.”

The point is this: life is a series of events, and until we've reached the end of the series, it's hard to know exactly why things are happening. Rabbi Simmons says: the way we usually perceive things is like this: A “good life” means that I make a comfortable living, I enjoy good health, and then I die peacefully at age 100. That's a good life. Anything else is “bad.”

In a limited sense, that's true. But if we have faith that there is eternity, then that changes the picture entirely. Hundred years in the face of eternity is not such a big deal. http://judaism.about.com/library/3_askrabbi_o/bl_simmons_murder.htm

Jesus is adding one more story: A man came looking for fruit on the fig tree but he found nothing there for three years. He says to the gardener, “Cut it down.”

But the gardener is pleading to the man for mercy, “Sir, let's give it another year. I'll dig around it and fertilize, and maybe it will produce next year...”

Maybe, we are all like that fig tree which had only leaves and branches but no fruit. But the good news is this: even though *we all fall short of God's glory*, God has been patient with us, looking for

some fruit on us. Even though we did not bear much fruit, we are still his beloved fig tree in his vineyard.

A problem is that the clock is ticking; we don't know when our time will be up, and that we, as fig trees, need some trimming and fertilizers in our souls and minds.

Life is a mystery. As I get older, I feel that there are more things I do not know about life than I did. When I was younger, I thought I was smart and knew a lot. But now, I am not even sure if I know enough about myself.

The bottom line is this: we need to have a right attitude. We need to look beyond the things we see happening here. In the mean time, we need more love and compassion for those who are suffering.

Self-righteousness is something Jesus could not stand. "I'm not perfect, but at least I'm better than so and so..." To this kind of attitude, Jesus had one response: "No, I tell you; but unless you repent.... you will all likewise perish."

In this Lent, let's take some time to look at ourselves and see where our souls and minds are; as we try to search for a right attitude, I am sure, God will be with us and help us. Amen.