

It seems that the Gospel today is letting us in to some current events of the time it was written – a kind of CNN moment. It describes two tragedies that occurred – tragedies apparently that killed many people. The first apparently was the slaughter of people by the Roman Governor of the region, Pontius Pilate. The second was an accident – a tower fell and killed many people – seems to have involved Jews.

Now it seems that Jesus is reacting to the speculation of the people in Jerusalem that all these people died because they were sinners. So Jesus is correcting this. These people did not die, Jesus says, because they were bigger sinners than anyone else. But then He uses it as a warning – “But if you do not repent of your sins, you will perish.” So what is Jesus talking about here?

Jesus reminds us of the truth that goes back to the beginning of creation, the warning from God – sin causes death. God first told this to Adam and Eve, “If you eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, you will die,” and they did and they died. First the spiritual death of separation from God and then physical death which came into the world because of their sin. So during the Lenten season, this is a message of which we need reminding – sin brings death.

Serious sin kills our relationship with God, seriously kills the spiritual life within us, a death knell in our relationships with others. Even small sins, venial sin, although they do not kill our relationship with God, they have an element of death to them, a wounding in our relationship with God and with others.

The evil one wants to lie to us about this truth. Look what Satan said to Adam and Eve: “Did God tell you you would die?” His words are lies – sin brings death.

So if we are tolerating sin in our lives, especially serious sin, thinking, “well, it’s not that big of a deal – it’s not really hurting anyone else,” or “I have special circumstances,” we are deceiving ourselves. Sin brings death – we have to trust Jesus’ word on that, and the further promise of Jesus is that repentance brings life. God’s mercy endures forever and He does not wish the death of a sinner, but that he would return to God and live. Repentance brings life because it opens the way to God’s mercy. Briefly then, what is repentance?

First, it is a complete turning from sin. There is no such thing as halfway repentance. If we are saying that we are repenting, but still holding on to a glimmer of intention to continue doing the sin, then we are not really repentant and we are still holding on to death.

So when we repent of our sins, we must have the firm intention not to do it again. Now, we don’t know the future, we don’t know if in a moment of temptation if we will fall again. But when we repent, we can’t let the fear of what we might do or not do in the future keep us from saying to God, “I’m not going to do it again.” When we repent, we have to make the firm choice to give up those sins in our lives and to beg God to give us the grace to say “No” to temptation when it comes knocking on our door again.

On the other side of it, if we fall into sin again, even after having repented, even after having made a firm intention no to do it again, we should never, ever despair. That is what Satan wants, for us to be beat down, for us to give up, for us to despair, thinking there is no way to be saved. If we fall again, humbly we go back to Jesus to confess our sins, asking for His mercy again,

which He so readily gives and start again, repenting, intending not to sin and begging for His help.

So during Lent, we examine our lives honestly: where have I let sin in? Where have I given myself excuses to sin? And we hear clearly the voice of Jesus that sin brings death.

Repentance and confession of our sin. Trusting in God's mercy, for He does not wish the sinner to die but to turn back to Him and live.

**Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent, 2016.**