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Saturday's Gospel: The Urgency to Convert

Gospel for Saturday in the 29th
Week of Ordinary Time, and
commentary.

Gospel (*Lk 13:1-9*)

There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen

upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?’ And he answered him, ‘Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

Commentary

Jesus' invitation to personal conversion continues to be urgent. The people present thought that the cause of some misfortunes and injustices were the sins of the victims. Even his disciples expressed this mentality when they saw the man blind from birth: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (cf. *Jn* 9:2). They made themselves infallible judges of other people’s consciences. Jesus, however, reproaches the people for their attitude, because they refuse to examine their own lives, and don’t know the state of their own soul or their need to convert.

Conversion is turning to God, and with the help of his light acknowledging one’s own sins and embarking on a new life, as expressed in the words of the Psalm: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy

blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me” (*Ps* 51:1-3). “Jesus is the face of the Father’s mercy,” Pope Francis reminded us when convoking the extraordinary jubilee of mercy.^[1]—

Jesus’ parable tells us about God’s patience. The owner of the fig tree planted in the vineyard has been waiting three years for that tree to bear fruit. And he is willing to wait a fourth year, because the vinedresser has promised that he will do everything possible to ensure that the next harvest is not fruitless again. Certainly, “the Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and rich in mercy” (cf. *Ps* 103:8). But God’s patience cannot be an excuse to delay our conversion, to stop turning again and again to the sources of divine grace: the

sacraments, the divine sap that imbues and vivifies our soul, and enables us to be people who bear fruit.

^[1] Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*, no. 1.

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