



Luke 13:1-9

1 Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. **2** At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? **3** They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. **4** Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? **5** They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.'

6 He told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. **7** He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, "Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" **8** "Sir," the man replied, "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: **9** it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.'"

Other readings: Exodus 3:1-8,13-15 Psalm 102 (103) 1 Corinthians 10:1-6,10-12

This gospel reading contains material found in no other gospel which raises crucial questions about the justice of God and the need for repentance. We frequently hear about human suffering, suffering inflicted by other people or resulting from 'natural disasters'. Suffering and tragedy have always led to the question 'Why me?' The random nature of human suffering leads many to question the existence of a loving God. What Jesus makes clear in the first part of this gospel passage is that suffering is not necessarily brought about by sin. Those who suffered at the hands of Pilate and in the collapse of the tower of Siloam were no guiltier than their fellows. Jesus does not explain at this point the meaning of innocent suffering. He acknowledges that it is part of the human condition. The answer he will give will be seen on Calvary.

The second part of the gospel reading contains the parable of the fig tree. Whereas in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus is seen cursing the fig tree which carries no fruit (Mark chapter 11 and Matthew chapter 21), here in Luke Jesus uses a parable to make the same point. The fig tree symbolises the people and their lack of fruitfulness. The gardener 'intercedes' for the fig tree, recalling the role of Jesus in relation to sinners. The gardener makes his appeal, but we are not told the reply. We may presume that the fig tree was granted a reprieve, but for how many years?

How long do I wait before responding to the call of God, the call of conscience?

What consolation can a Christian offer in the face of innocent suffering?

We pray for openness to learn from the words of Christ.

We pray for generosity in living out the gospel.

